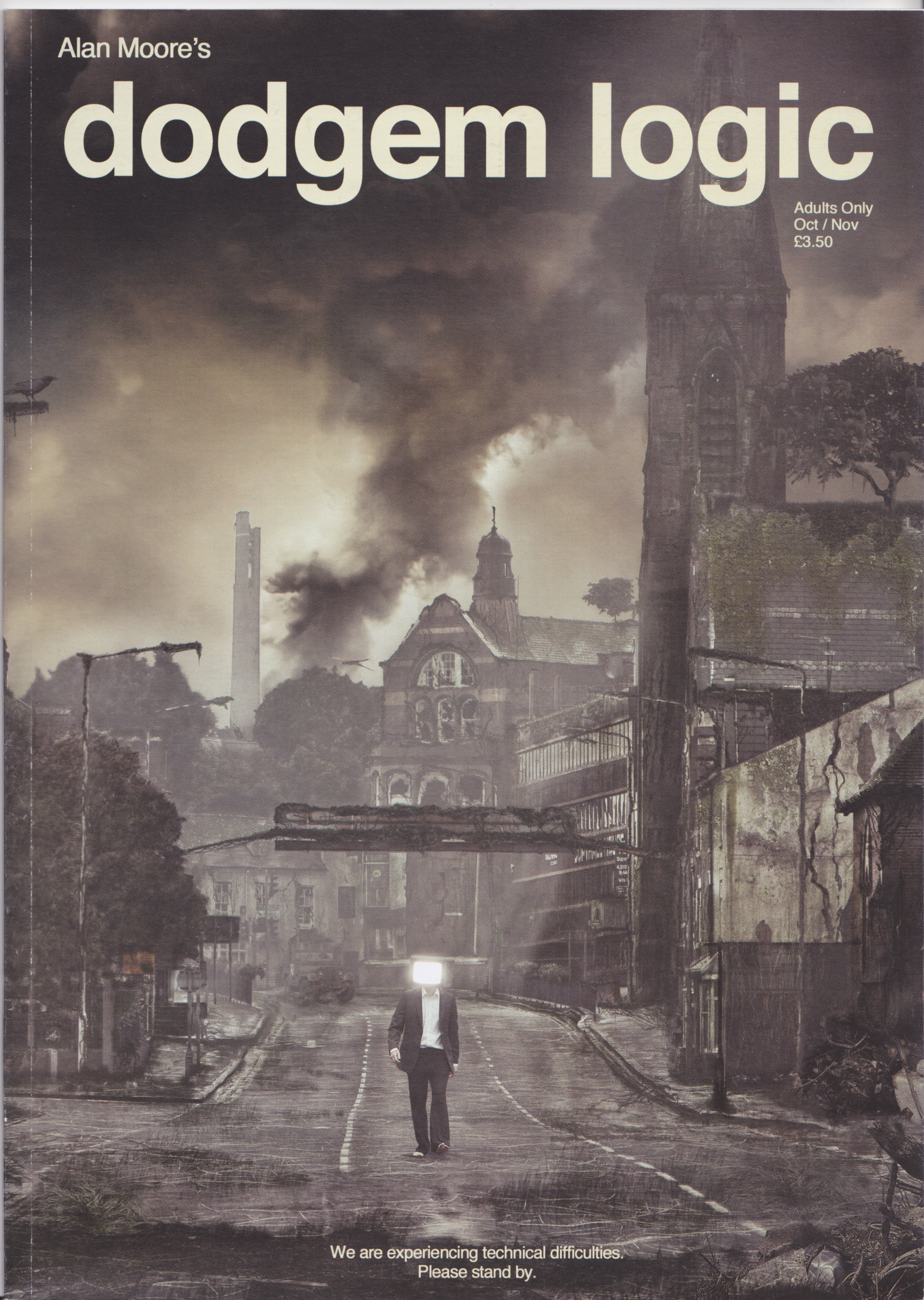


Alan Moore's

# dodgem logic

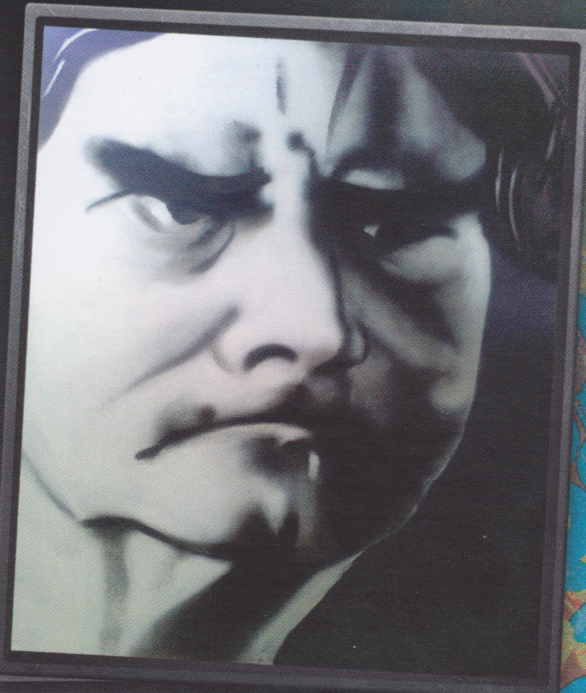
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# GREAT HIPSTERS IN HISTORY



GREAT HIPSTERS in HISTORY!

## No. 16 : Austin Osman Spare

Arguably England's greatest 20th century artist (and occultist), policeman's son Austin Spare was born near London's Smithfield Market, 1886. By age 16, championed by John Singer Sergeant, his work delighted the Royal Academy, though he soon rejected success to live amongst Brixton's lowlifes, exhibiting in pubs. Rejecting Aleister Crowley's conception of 'Magick' Spare devised his own system involving automatic drawing and 'sigils', compound calligraphy to stimulate the subconscious. Spare, precursor to Surrealism and Pop Art who once refused to paint Hitler's portrait, died in South London, 1956, surrounded by his beloved cats, a true heir to William Blake's visionary legacy.



GREAT HIPSTERS in HISTORY!

## No. 17 : Colette

Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, product of France's Burgundy region in 1873, married the disreputable 'Willy' (Henri Gauthier-Villars) in 1893, leaving him in 1906 after he'd claimed authorship of her early 'Claudine' novels. She enjoyed various affairs with women such as Natalie Barney, Mathilde de Morny (or 'Missy') and reputedly Josephine Baker while pursuing a music hall career, then in 1912 married Henri de Jouvenel before commencing an affair with her stepson. Her writing, marked by a sensual clarity, achieved great acclaim after WWI, with *Gigi* later making a successful film. Dying in 1954, she was a great writer, beauty and bohemian.



GREAT HIPSTERS in HISTORY!

## No. 18 : Samuel R. Delany

Born Harlem, 1942, Samuel 'Chip' Delany wrote his first novel aged 19 and was published by age 20, his early works jewelled with wonderful invention and an outsider's perspective as the only black and openly gay author working in the 1960s' New Wave science fiction field. His novel *Dhalgren*, 1975, prefigured a shift towards more personal and intellectually rich material that has seen Delany establish a reputation as both critic and fearlessly human pornographer. In *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* he laments the Disneyfication of New York's sexual melting pot and continues to be amongst our hippest, most eloquent social commentators.

It's issue six...  
contents of it...  
each other that...  
and complaints...  
Alix at HOA...  
Northampton...





## BIG SOCIETY, LITTLE HITLER

I saw the Big Society, and it wasn't as big as it looked on television. It had a concerned expression and it was carrying a scythe. It told me it was confident that many of our current problems could be much reduced if we had different chins, and if we subcontracted MI6 out to News International. It told me it didn't believe in government interference, and that by 'interference' it meant 'funding'. It placed a reassuring hand upon my shoulder and told me that the very last thing it wanted to do was to brutally rape me, but that a list of all the things it wanted to do to me first was available online. It was wearing an old school tie made out of my gran. It said we were all going to have to tighten our belts except, obviously, for those members of the banking community who had long outgrown even the distant memory of belts. It hoped I'd understand about selling Wales to China. It promised that any legislation concerning internment camps for gypsies would be announced by the fat bloke from *Gavin & Stacey*. It assured me that it was a listening administration while it doodled cocks on its iPad and said 'uh-huh' at fifteen-second intervals. It apologised for punching middle-class families squarely in the face by explaining that the working classes were in hospital and therefore unavailable. All the piranhas in the fountain were wearing little top hats and monocles. Welcome to Dodgem Logic.

This issue, our little boy-or-girl...the midwife just shrugged and looked non-committal...is one year old. Of course, as in the first twelve months of any life, we've seen our fair share of angry tears, shit and vomit, but there have also been those precious 'firsts': first grotesque drawings of phallic creatures that look like they're probably having some sort of sex with themselves; first demonic incantations and howling prophecies of the downfall of civilisation; first *Godfather*-themed hot water bottle cover; first trip to a burlesque show. We've had smiles that might just be wind, we've had gurgles, and we've had *Astro Dick*. We've nurtured our tiny, helpless infant and encouraged it to grow and be strong in a difficult world, and anything it may later say about beatings with coat hangers or underground sex-dungeons should be treated with the derision and disbelief.

As for the ingredients in this celebratory birthday cake, iced with HAPPY BIRTHDAY IN BIG LETTERS ON THE TOP in big letters on the top, we have a mixed fruit of more-than-usually delicious Great Hipsters from Calluz and doomed swine from Steve Aylett. We have the nourishing wholegrain flour of Patrick Smyth's 21st century medieval pilgrimage, the free range eggs of Wendi Jarrett, and the sincere wish that we'd never started with this whole birthday cake metaphor. Or at least that we hadn't used 'mixed fruit' so early on, as then we could have Savage Pencil and David Quantick's continuing commentary on cat-fancier Louis Wain as sultan, Gary Mills' discourse on digitalization as currants, Robin Ince's totalitarian impulses as raisins...possibly with some sort of pun about reason and rationality that I can't be bothered to think through...and Dave Hamilton, Claire Ashby, Barney Farmer and Lee Healey as some sort of slightly bitter candied peel. Then Downtown Joe Brown's Wesley Willis tribute, Eric Rivera's Pointless Dream and the Spinning Doctors could be, like, cherries or something. I've honestly got no idea how we're going to work 'Mustard' into all this unless it's a cake made by Heston Blumenthal, in which case we might as well say that Margaret Killjoy and Kevin O'Neill are the jus of uranium, Dick Foreman's paean to underground comics and Tamsyn Payne's squishy skull instructions are the croustade of deaf seahorses, and Martin Marprelate, Gary Ingham and Norman Adams are alarm clocks marinated in the sighs of condemned men. The icing would be Melinda Gebbie's PVC-bound memoir of the bondage and fetish scene, DoseONE's crackling *Eat Majoris*, Stewart Lee's alcohol-fuelled punch-up with Carlsberg...leave 'em, Stew, they're not worth it...and Iain Sinclair's mesmerising interview with Brigid Marlin, the woman who captured J.G. Ballard on canvas. Which leaves the cover-featured nostalgic-for-the-new-wave piece by the gentlemen at HOAX and myself as one of those novelty candles that keeps relighting until somebody gets a collapsed lung.

You may have noticed that our former insert, Notes from Noho, has been brought indoors this issue. This is in recognition of our abject failure to make our regional insert scheme either affordable or workable. Tell you what, if you want to come up with your own regional magazines in whatever style suits you and your finances, then we'll publicise it for free here in Dodgem Logic. How's that? So, anyway, be here next time for our Christmas Spectacular, or the terrorists will have won.

Alan Moore ~ Captain of Industry & Colossus of Rhodes

DODGEM DUDES: THEY WROTE THE BOOK OF LOVE.

Alan Moore ~ Overfiend Tony Knockabout Bennett ~ Co Publisher and Jiminy Cricket Conscience Queen Calluz ~ Editor and Destroyer of Worlds  
Downtown Joe Brown ~ Assistant Editor and Destroyer of Asteroids Gavin & Alix at HOAX ~ Grand Designs, making a Porter cabin into a Palace  
Claire Ashby ~ She can hear the Grass Grow Joe Moore ~ Indentured Slave and Nepotism Consultant

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# WESLEY WILLIS

**BUSKING, DRAWING, CHRONIC SCHIZOPHRENIA, LEUKAEMIA, UNTIMELY DEATH - AND HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF SONGS. SONGS THAT ARE TO ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES THE SAME. AN ACQUIRED TASTE, BUT ONE THAT MAKES THE WORLD SEEM LIKE A HARMONY JOY RIDE.**

words/pictures: joe brown

Once upon a time, there was a man called Wesley Willis. He made his own music. He sang about things he did and saw. I like this man a lot.

Nostalgia. Looking backwards can be hazardous - it can seriously bore those around you, leading to injury if they stop your wistful reminiscences by physical means. Sometimes the past bobs to the surface at inexplicable moments, without warning. Every so often I miss my old band mates, mourning silently for my misspent youth - there is a real danger of me turning into the man from 'Crème Brûlée'. No more would we grace the stages of the world (mostly the Freebutt in Brighton to be honest) in the hastily constructed cartoonish costumes which inadvertently stripped us of the ability to play our instruments properly - no more would our ridiculous so-called 'Spazcore' (in the dictionary sense of spasmodic, you understand) ring out to the indifference of the general populous. Life gets in the way, like some tall bastard at a gig. There are little triggers that take me back into the heady memories of sweat and cardboard that was life in 'The 'Phil Collins 3' - the most potent of these is Wesley Willis.

Now it may well be the case that you are very much aware of Wesley Willis. His music pops up impudently from time to time - his song 'Rock n' Roll McDonalds' is on the soundtrack of Morgan Spurlock's fast food endurance documentary 'Super Size Me' - a song in which Wesley bemoans that Big Macs make you fat, and that the burgers are worse than those of Burger King. If there is anything to be said about his music, it is that it is very direct.

The first snatch of a track that I ever heard was on a Rough Trade compilation of 'Bastard Pop' mash-ups (the author is fully aware that this phrase is not at all cool. He is not cool. He uses phrases like 'cool'. Not cool.) - it was part of a Cassetteboy Christmas special, and appropriately enough was

entitled 'Merry Christmas'. It was like nothing I had ever heard. It was about Christmas, and I had of course heard songs about Christmas before, but not like this one. This was something else entirely.

"CHRISTMAS MAKES PEOPLE FEEL RIGHT AT HOME  
CHRISTMAS GIVES ME HARMONIZATION  
CHRISTMAS IS JESUS CHRIST'S BIRTHDAY  
THAT'S WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT IN THE MIX

MERRY CHRISTMAS (RPT)"

MERRY CHRISTMAS



There was no irony, no self consciousness. There was a standard electronic keyboard backing track, the kind where you play single fingered chords and the instrument would make its own jaunty tune. There was also a man talking about what Christmas was, and wishing people a merry one. A simple, heartfelt sentiment expressed in a unique way. That was it for me. There was an unhealthy compulsion ignited inside me to hear more. There is something about his music that is very compelling - almost hypnotic. You have to be the right kind of person, though - it would drive others mad, and some might even question your motives for listening to it.

The structure of the vast (really vast) majority of a Wesley Willis song is always exactly the same: verse, chorus (which is the title of the song repeated a few times), verse, chorus, middle eight, verse, chorus, and then the phrase 'Rock over London, Rock down Chicago' followed by an advertising slogan, such as 'Wheaties: Breakfast of Champions'. This underlying structure of his music is reassuring - you know exactly when things will happen - when he will start using the 'fill-in' button on the keyboard to start the middle section for instance - but nothing would prepare you for Wesley's use of language. He would employ some very powerful imagery, which would not be easy to forget - titles like "Birdman kicked my





# ROCK SADDAM HUSSEIN'S ASS BACK TO RUSSIA

ass", "Outburst" and "Fuck You" as well as the strangely tender "Feel The Power of Rock and Roll" offer up some indelible mental pictures for the uninitiated listener.

Wesley Willis was born in Chicago, Illinois. He was diagnosed as a chronic schizophrenic. He was an artist who drew landscapes of his native city, and lots of buses, which he loved to ride on. He was a rock and roll star. Wesley cut an imposing figure. He was 6ft 5in, on the large side, with a round callus in the centre of his forehead. There is a good reason for it - when he met someone, he would head butt them - very gently compared to Zinedine Zidane, but a head butt nonetheless. Legend has it that if he met someone new, he would head butt them and stare directly into their eyes until he could trust them. Head butting people could be construed as an intense form of the handshake, and I cannot see why it hasn't caught on, especially for heads of state.

Like many of his fans, I find a lot of his songs very funny. Now you may very well ask yourself 'Is it OK to laugh at a Chronic Schizophrenic?' Like all matters in life, it depends on your point of view. I've always had an interest in what many label 'Outsider Art' - those individuals who do not follow the well worn path, who through obsessive enthusiasm for whatever medium they choose end up creating their own art language. It's a uniquely human compulsion to create art, and having been around the block a few times, I've seen the same themes and styles come, go, then come again, with new haircuts and tighter jeans. Having endured a typical art school education, with the same kind of people producing the same kind of work over and over, year after year, the divergent nature of 'Outsider' artists was like a ray of strangely coloured light. Wesley Willis was an artist and musician with a mental illness. As a consequence or in spite of his condition, and the many

hardships he had to endure, he created a body of work which had a wholly different perspective to that of many people, one that is engaging, and a lot of the time, funny.

Wesley would write songs about everything. If there was something he liked or disliked, he would write a song about it. He wrote about bands he went to see, he wrote about celebrities, he wrote about superheroes, he wrote about getting his oil changed.

"THE OIL CHANGE COST ME FIFTEEN DOLLARS  
THE PRICE WAS VERY AFFORDABLE  
THE JOB WAS DONE  
IT WAS DONE RIGHT

OIL EXPRESS (RPT)"

OIL EXPRESS



Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bill Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, Elvis Presley, Alanis Morissette, Johnny Depp, and even his friend Jello Biafra have been immortalised in Wesley's unmistakable way. In my eyes, having Wesley do a song about you is the highest of compliments. I envy all the people and bands that he saw fit to sing about.

Now, be warned, those of a sensitive disposition - there is a lot of bad language in his songs. This is not the frivolous use of profanity you may find in other musical genres. The voices in Wesley's head, his 'Demons', would swear and curse at him. When he was compelled to answer them back in similar fashion, it would cause problems and upset, especially in public places. Some of the more extreme bestial imagery that features in his work was an attempt to make his 'Demons' recoil in horror, and thus leave him alone. He used to call the bad experiences resulting from his condition 'Hell rides', and there are many songs that deal with such occurrences. Through his music Wesley had an outlet for these 'Hell rides', and that by writing about them he could feel better, and even defend himself from the internal onslaught. How can anyone not suffering with mental

illness truly know what it's like to live with such voices? Listening to his music helps you understand his problems, and a greater understanding of the troubles of others is no bad thing. It may even make you a more considerate, compassionate person.

Wesley was a cult figure. He toured the world. He released many albums, and had the time of his life. Music made him happy. Who would begrudge him that?

With all that Wesley had to deal with in his life, contracting Leukaemia seemed like life itself was massively taking the piss. The fact that he did so much despite all the hardships bestowed on him shames every moaning numbskull on the planet. When we heard that Wesley had died, The Phil Collins 3 all wanted to do something to commemorate him, to show how much we appreciated what he had brought to the world. We decided to hold a memorial concert. We all dressed as Arnold Schwarzenegger, each of us from a different film. The crowd roared like a lion. We decided that the money we raised from the gig would go towards his funeral costs, although ideally we would have wanted to have a bronze bust made, so Wesley could go on head butting his fans forever.

I never got to see him play, never got to meet him, let alone receive a head butt. There are many that have. They are very lucky people. There will not be another Wesley Willis.

Rock Over London, Rock Down Chicago.

Heinz - It's America's favourite ketchup.



Wesley Willis albums & MP3s are available at [www.alternativetentacles.com](http://www.alternativetentacles.com)



# KISS THE ROD

by Iain Sinclair

**A**n English train. On a glorious summer morning. I am struggling to locate the precise point at which we pass over or under the M25, London's tarmac collar: without success. The railway system lays down its metal rails, ladders for commuters, with no reference to the self-consuming serpent of the orbital motorway. Rivers and railways were always my favourite zones of transport. Time to drift with the landscape; to sit, barely registering geological shifts, dipping into a book, deprogramming a clotted backlog.

I like the way that the steady-stare film-maker Patrick Keiller speaks of using train-time. He is a man, clearly, who abhors waste; a hoarder of old newspapers, careful with his finances, well aware of, and prepared for, the fact that the next gig might be the last. Keiller uses trains like an editing suite: he auditions unofficial narratives, unregistered places. In the first phase of his career, when he worked, as I did, as a part-time lecturer in Walthamstow, he explored out of the way locales searching for compositions suitable for a catalogue of surrealist architecture. The unfathomable mess of London, which might, if he had to evaluate it, drive him mad, was brought to book: a sewage cathedral alongside muddy Channalsea Creek in the Lower Lea Valley, a coal hopper in Nine Elms Lane, a concrete factory in Gravesend. Somewhere in the background of all these ghosted structures was a railway.

Keiller called his chosen sites 'found' architecture. And a favoured technique for finding them involved spotting possibles from a train window and then making an expedition, by bicycle, to bag the image. Accidents of transit, undescribed, went into the captured photograph; a private archive that would, eventually, transform itself into a series of groundbreaking films. What Keiller didn't appreciate, at the start, was that he was being shadowed by future phantoms: the rasping ironies of Paul Schofield who would become his fictional avatar, deliverer of scripted monologues - and the mysterious 'Robinson', a being brought into existence as a cultural 'beard', to take on the adventures of a fantasy life the film-maker was too fastidious to experience at first hand.

In an essay called 'Imaging', Keiller describes how he set out to look for a place he had seen a few days earlier from a train window. 'It was a north-facing hillside of allotments behind the corner of two streets of suburban houses, beyond the railway's bridge above the North Circular Road.' Mounted on his bicycle, disorientated, a little puffed, he found something else: a metal footbridge. A bridge that dictated its own terms. 'Its long, narrow walkway resembled the linearity of a film; its parapets framed the view in a ratio similar to the 4 x 3 of the camera, and its elaborate articulation, with several flights of steps, half-landings and changes of direction, offered a structure for a moving-camera choreography which might include panoramas.' The bridge, waiting all this time for an unsuspecting interpreter, was revealed to the world as the setting for two Keiller films: the launch of a new career. The whole curious process - train, bicycle, camera - drew the architectural photographer into a situation that left him no choice but to ventriloquise a previously mute element of the city. Keller was the thing found, not Stonebridge Park.

My ride to Berkhamsted, on this blameless May morning, pushed me to read the train window as a frame for the contemplation of an exceptional group of British film-essayists. Chris Petit, of late, had been posting, on his website, fragments from his travels. He was one of those trapped by the Icelandic dust cloud in a place that suddenly takes on another identity, something more than a stop-over. He was attending a film festival in Buenos Aires, which he found rather dull, architecturally, but blessed with cheap taxis. To escape, he took a boat to Montevideo, a flight to Madrid, another flight to Rome, a train to Milan. The train windows were misted, the landscape enervated and dim: he let his new pocket Mino-HD Flip camera run, uninterrupted, like the birth of cinema. And sent the result to his friends in lieu of a Ballardian postcard.





My less exotic ride into comfortable Hertfordshire was a return to Ballard, after a number of necessary digressions, European trips, expeditions to Middlesbrough, Suffolk, Bristol, Newcastle. Only the day before, I had completed, with another itinerant and restless film-maker, the hyperkinetic Andrew Kötting, the reconnaissance for a potential swan voyage, by pedalo, from the south coast to the Olympic Park. When I discussed my notion of carrying a whalebone box, by water, using a kayak like the one with which I had penetrated the Olympic backwaters, alongside Stephen Gill, Kötting offered himself as a companion, but suggested at once an interesting variant: that we liberate a swan pedalo from the Hastings pleasure park and put to sea, around the coast to Rye. Then meander through military canals, rivers, ponds and gravel pits, to the Thames. If we ran out of water, we would drag the beast ashore, in the spirit of Werner Herzog, and manhandle it to the next launching place. Irresistible. My only stipulation was that the journey be completed before the opening ceremony for the 2012 Games. Another sweat-drenched exorcism. Another project that, by its mission statement, disqualified itself from any expectation of sponsorship, even though it fulfilled all current requirements in terms of 'direction of travel'. Towards insanity. Pure and undiluted.

Kötting hauled a plastic swan, a lure, as we walked. We were accompanied by a pair of mature students from the art college where he taught: one of them had got himself into shape for this by completing the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and the other kept a record with a pinhole camera made from a Swan Vesta matchbox. Random encounters calibrated our progress. Coming down the Swale, from Sittingbourne to Whitstable, I was pointing across to the prison on the Isle of Sheppey and reminiscing about Joe Orton's holiday stretch for defacing Islington library books, when we were joined by a bullet-headed man in a hooded Lonsdale sweatshirt carrying a tin bucket. 'Seventeen,' he said. 'Seventeen poxy crabs.' A former member of West Ham's Inner City Firm, he had personal experience of Sheppey and the house on the hill reserved for the most violent offenders. Now an amiable manifestation of place, he was prepared to overlook Kötting's provocative Millwall allegiance. And to demonstrate the sexing of crabs, by tearing off their legs. On a good morning, he could fill his pail with seventy or more, limbless but gender specific, bait for fishermen. By the time we reached the headland from which a ferry no longer runs to the pub where my novel *Downriver* concluded, Kötting was sharing his sandwiches with a pair of failed royal dogs, black retrievers who didn't retrieve. Windsor Castle passed them on, so the well-bred lady explained, through contacts in hunting circles.

The journey becomes a choir of eccentric soloists, the previously unnoticed waiting to tell their tale. Around the Olympic Park, the air was so heady, men with dusty mouths were tipping like ninepins. A cheery soul on a spinster's bicycle scavenged the verges, the tangled thickets around the rat traps and mesh fences; with a mechanical hand of his own devising, he grabbed blue cans flung out of passing white vans, or dumped by migrating drinking schools. He filled sacks for charity, covering many miles a day in a forlorn circuit of the Olympic perimeter. Beside the A11, approaching Stratford, a man had gone down, sprawled full-length at the roadside, prodded by an ambulance team eager to tidy him away: a premature celebrant, flag of St George, hammered into a reeking coma in expectation of triumphs postponed in South Africa. The proprietor of the sole surviving business, a barber called Giuseppe, twenty years in the game, was surrounded by red cones, chicken wire, and overweening future developments. He gripped a Stanley knife and waited for the first council official to offer him compensation. In his window was a black-and-white photograph of a sharp-suited man with a Mexican moustache, and attitude, like a Liverpool footballer from the Eighties.

I had an appointment with the painter Brigid Marlin, the one who produced the Delvaux copies for Ballard. Brigid had written to me, after reading an account I'd published of my expedition to Old Charlton Road in Shepperton. In compensation for taking on the onerous task of reproducing works for which she had no particular affection, she compelled the reluctant novelist to pose for a portrait.

'Painting J.G. Ballard was an unusual experience,' she told me. 'He was a very obstreperous model. He wanted to take control all the time.'

So many conflicting rumours were circulating, in the months after the writer's death, that I wanted to listen to an eye-witness account of the intimate process of sitting for a portrait. It was difficult to avoid contributing to the prevailing mythology: the sanctification of the Shepperton anchorite. Ballard the good father. Ballard the spurner of metropolitan flimflam. Ballard the prophet and visionary, first man of the motorway corridor. Post-mortem sentiment congeals the legend: before the inevitable reaction, the teasing out of the flaws that make us human. The way he had, over almost half a century, manipulated autobiographical routines was exemplary - until he arrived at the elegant simplicity, the shifting of significant detail, for that last book, *Miracles of Life*, when all outstanding dues were paid.

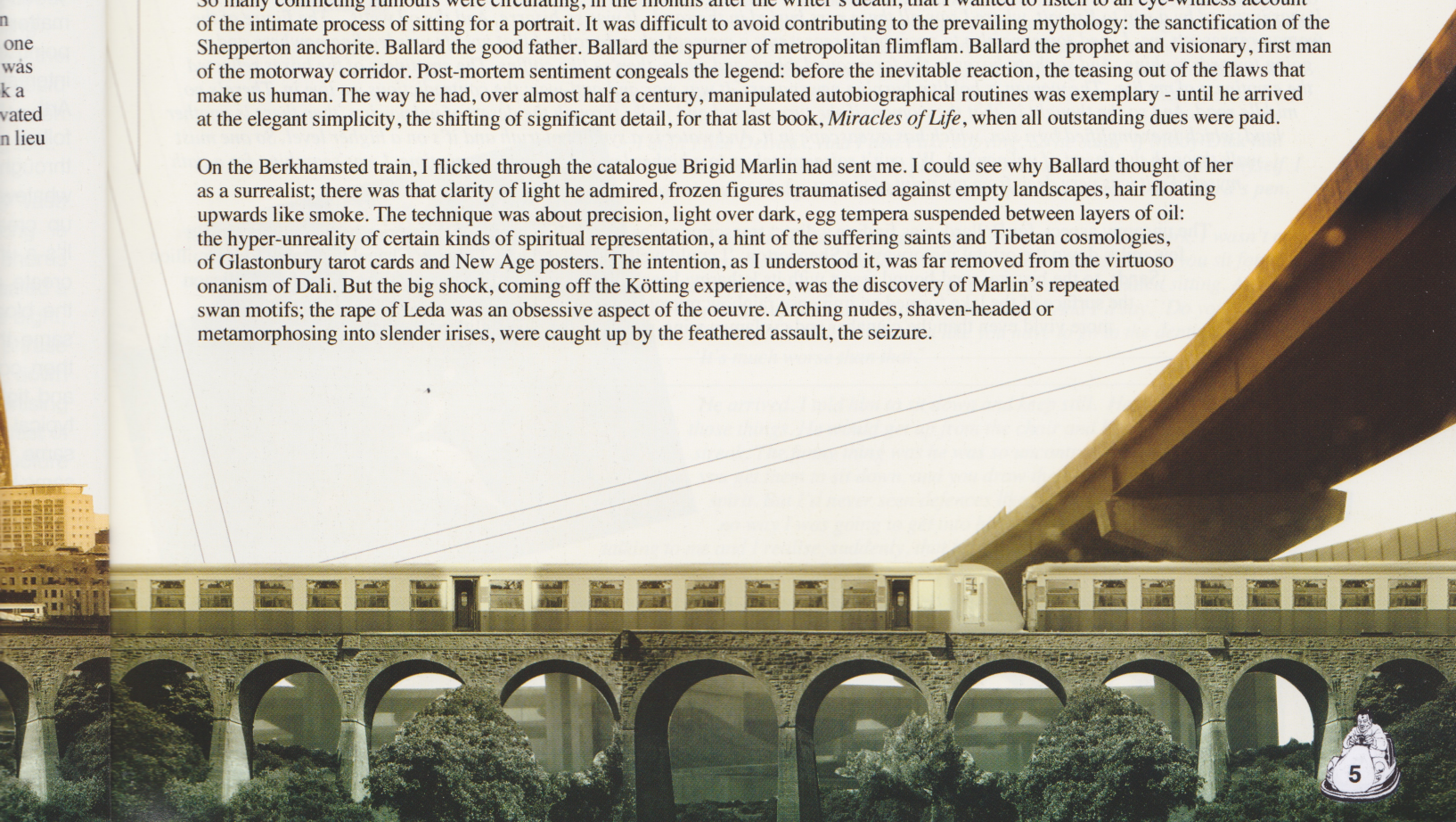
On the Berkhamsted train, I flicked through the catalogue Brigid Marlin had sent me. I could see why Ballard thought of her as a surrealist; there was that clarity of light he admired, frozen figures traumatised against empty landscapes, hair floating upwards like smoke. The technique was about precision, light over dark, egg tempera suspended between layers of oil: the hyper-unreality of certain kinds of spiritual representation, a hint of the suffering saints and Tibetan cosmologies, of Glastonbury tarot cards and New Age posters. The intention, as I understood it, was far removed from the virtuoso onanism of Dali. But the big shock, coming off the Kötting experience, was the discovery of Marlin's repeated swan motifs; the rape of Leda was an obsessive aspect of the oeuvre. Arching nudes, shaven-headed or metamorphosing into slender irises, were caught up by the feathered assault, the seizure.

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One painting, *The Rod*, became Ballard's touchstone. He wrote Marlin what he described as 'the only fan letter' he had ever sent to a painter, after seeing a reproduction in a magazine. He dealt in reproductions, postcards, portable versions of masterworks with the blight of originality filtered out. The industrial processes of mass-marketing make an image more desirable, more used, less tainted by sanctimonious and elitist notions of the unique moment, the burden of ownership. An inaccurate copy was a neutered multiple to be cut out, as required, stuck on a wall, pasted into a scrapbook collage. Taken apart and reassembled as part of a pulp magazine fiction. Ballard was claustrophobic about art events, openings: he made an exception for Brigid Marlin.

It's easy to see the appeal of this Kuwait painting from 1973, *The Rod*. The one that looks as if it could very easily have been commissioned for the dustwrapper of Ballard's *Vermilion Sands*, a collection of interlinked tales published in the same year. Marlin's painting and the Ballard jacket designed by Brian Knight are interchangeable. Snake-eyed women with flowing hair or complicated headdresses. Sand. Ruins. The same wind-sculpted towers of rock, Monument Valley molars. *The Rod*, in its cinemascope format, is an authentic Ballard inscape produced by an artist who had never opened any of his books. Encouraged by a friend with a taste for futuristic genre fiction, Marlin put her painting into a competition for sf-inspired work: and took first prize.

There is a fever, an erotic imperative, in Ballard's pursuit. He almost believes – he has earned the right – that he can live in the work, move through the screen of Marlin's meticulously constructed layers of glaze and varnish into the ground of her imagination. He claims droit du seigneur over these preternaturally still women who are naked, draped in transparent webs, posed in woodland, beside lakes, in front of vistas of cracked earth. They are threatened by mechanised swans, beaked ravens, burning oil wells, stalled motorways, newspaper headlines. He recognises the figure projected into *Vermilion Sands*, his 'Prima Belladonna', in the Marlin portfolio. And he suspects that the model is Marlin herself: the artist and her mirror, a metaphor for the lost Delvaux painting he wants her to recreate. To sit beside the desk where he writes, every day.

'I assumed,' he wrote in his introduction to Marlin's catalogue, 'that the wistful and even ethereal figure who appeared in many of the paintings was a self-portrait of the artist. In fact, I was quite wrong.'

This conjunction, painter and writer coming together in a studio, beyond the outer rim of London, to conjure up a vanished Delvaux, is a potential Henry James novella, of mutual misunderstanding, an oblique dialogue on the nature of art and portraiture: who will write this other into existence? And which painting, Marlin's transcription of the reluctant Ballard or her revised Delvaux, is the truer mapping of the psychopathology of the Shepperton visionary?

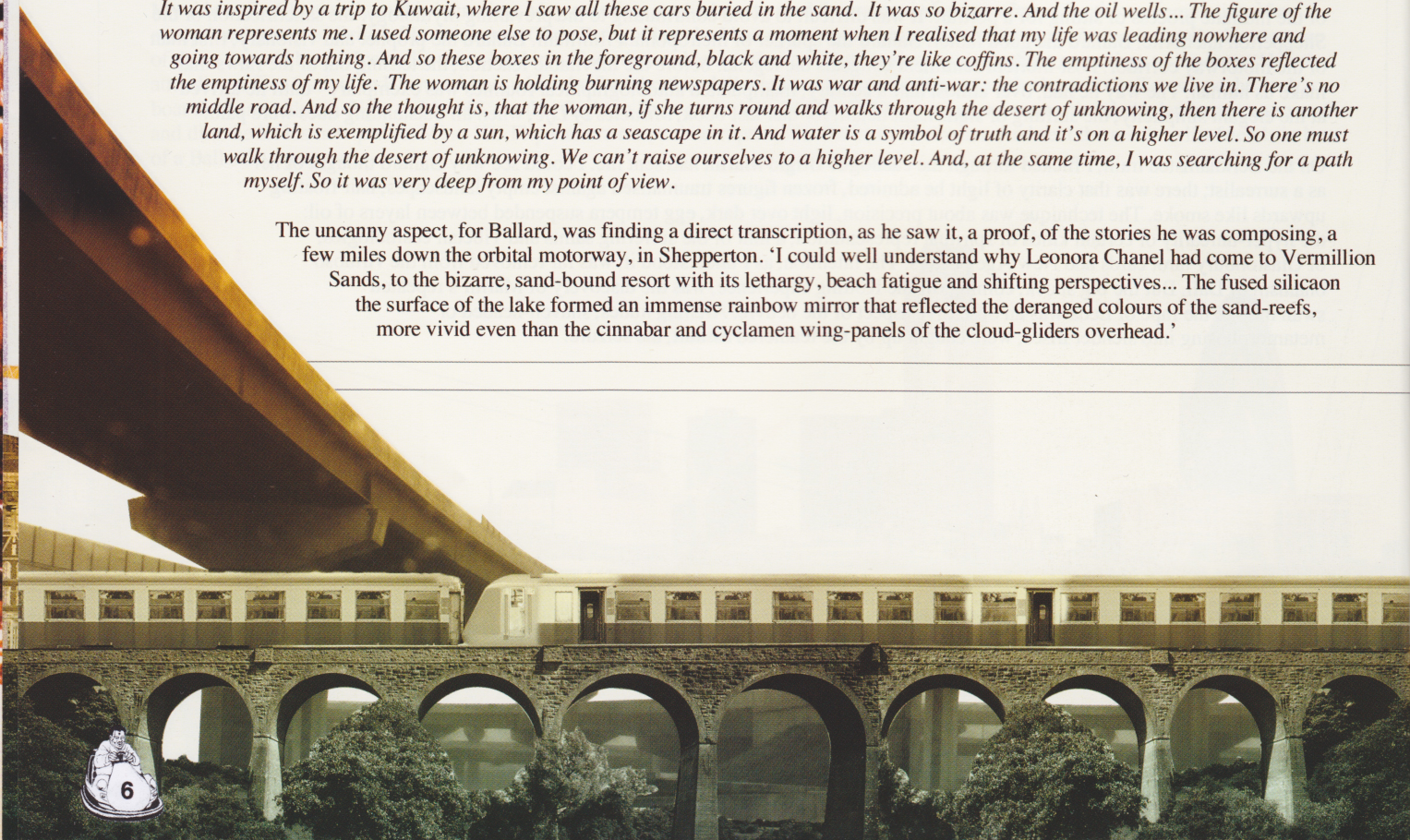
Berkhamsted, as you come out of the station, is a *Midsomer Murders* location, without the cast, the troubled vicars, the industrialists laying out golf clubs with which they will, before the first set of adverts, be beaten to a pulp. They say the franchise plays well in France: England as it ought to be, stereotypical, monocultural, with rigid social hierarchies, cute villages, seething repression and gothic violence. Language transfers, as with W.G. Sebald, enrich the package: the reflex banality of the tourist board branding exercise picks up an existential gloss. I'm a little early for my appointment. I circle around the fenced-off castle ruins and up the hill. Footpaths splay out in every direction, protected by barbed wire: PLEASE DO NOT CLIMB OVER THIS FENCE. Bushes dressed with hawthorn blossom mark the borders of close-cropped fields that drop away towards a line of distant hills. Llamas munch in the company of shade-seeking donkeys.

Brigid Marlin's conservatory looks out, without interruption, on a spread of protected greenbelt countryside. Ballard described her as 'a tall and attractive American woman with a strong personality and a lively sense of humour'. Meaning that she did not always, or ever, agree with him. And that she was able to laugh about it. In patterned blue, shades picked up in several of her own paintings which decorate the walls, Brigid welcomes me and lays out the lunch. She is constantly smiling, seeing the absurdity that comes with any interrogation of the past, with summoning up the presence of Jim Ballard, who so provoked and intrigued her.

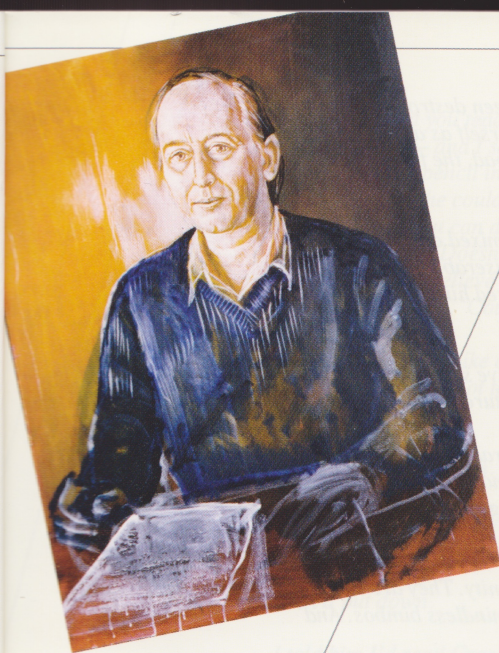
I asked about that painting, *The Rod*, the one that brought Ballard to her studio with his photographs of the lost Delvaux paintings.

*It was inspired by a trip to Kuwait, where I saw all these cars buried in the sand. It was so bizarre. And the oil wells... The figure of the woman represents me. I used someone else to pose, but it represents a moment when I realised that my life was leading nowhere and going towards nothing. And so these boxes in the foreground, black and white, they're like coffins. The emptiness of the boxes reflected the emptiness of my life. The woman is holding burning newspapers. It was war and anti-war: the contradictions we live in. There's no middle road. And so the thought is, that the woman, if she turns round and walks through the desert of unknowing, then there is another land, which is exemplified by a sun, which has a seascape in it. And water is a symbol of truth and it's on a higher level. So one must walk through the desert of unknowing. We can't raise ourselves to a higher level. And, at the same time, I was searching for a path myself. So it was very deep from my point of view.*

The uncanny aspect, for Ballard, was finding a direct transcription, as he saw it, a proof, of the stories he was composing, a few miles down the orbital motorway, in Shepperton. 'I could well understand why Leonora Chanel had come to *Vermilion Sands*, to the bizarre, sand-bound resort with its lethargy, beach fatigue and shifting perspectives... The fused silica on the surface of the lake formed an immense rainbow mirror that reflected the deranged colours of the sand-reefs, more vivid even than the cinnabar and cyclamen wing-panels of the cloud-gliders overhead.'







Ballard critiques a painting he has never seen. Marlin reproduces the inscape of an author she has never read. She is exposed, when he arrives at her studio, not as a tailored fashion plate, nor a desert-dwelling surrealist: neither Coco Chanel, nor Leonora Carrington. But a very real woman, with a history, her own agenda, and a set of spiritual beliefs for which Ballard has no obvious sympathy or understanding.

*The woman in my painting was a very feminine woman, very gentle. She represented resignation and suffering. But, in a strange way, there was something in Jim Ballard that wanted, not only to dominate women, but to suppress his own female quality, his anima. He wasn't prepared to face the anima. He was doing battle with his own inner spirit almost all of his life. And, when we met, my inner paintings didn't resemble my outer persona, because I was quite aggressive and bouncy. I don't think Jim was quite prepared for this. He expected some little fragile creature.*

*He's not the only one who has seen my paintings and visualised a very different person. There was this disastrous trip I took across America. I was paid by this man to go all around the country and he was going to meet me at the end. He'd fallen in love with this painting I did of a beautiful eighteen-year-old. And there I was at the bus stop... I was never an absolute Venus. And on top of that I was forty-five. So the blow was terrible for him. It was like High Noon. He pushed me aside and kept looking for someone else. Everyone left and we were the only two people in the terminal, facing each other. Pistols at dawn.*

*Ballard too! He was prepared to come and overpower this fragile creature. And the fragile creature gave as good as she got.*

*He was saying that although he had fame he was totally uninfluenced by it. I said, 'Oh yeah, you're totally free from any kind of vanity, aren't you?' Ha! 'And any kind of egotism?' For god's sake! It was really funny.*

Brigid reads the face. She likes it. She wants him to sit there, quietly, while she gets to work. She fixes Ballard as a Marlin portrait, to present in her catalogue, alongside the Dalai Lama, the travel writer Cecil Lewis and a beribboned Queen Mother. He solicits a Delvaux, brought back from extinction, colour flooding a monochrome print. A physical representation of the most heart-felt psychodramas of his fiction.

*I didn't like Delvaux. And I don't like copying. So he said, 'If Moby-Dick had been destroyed, I'd be perfectly prepared to rewrite it.' I question that myself. I wondered if Moby-Dick would have emerged unscathed from Ballard's pen.*

*I thought: 'He's got an interesting face.' I hadn't read his work. I wasn't at all interested in that kind of book. I put the proposition: 'Either you sit for me or the copying is no go.' He didn't like that. He said he hated sitting. And in fact he'd ring up and say, 'Do I have to come?' And I'd say, 'Do you want your Delvaux?' I said, 'You sound like you have to go to the dentist.' He said, 'It's much worse than that.'*

*He arrived. I told him to sit down and keep still. He didn't do either of those things. He would get up from the chair and he would talk a blue streak. The funny thing was he was so uncontrollable. Most sitters, when you get them to sit down, and you draw them out, you get to see their inner spirit. But I'd never seen defences like those put up by Ballard. There was no way I was going to get into his inner spirit. And, instead, he starts talking to me and I realise, suddenly, that he is writing me, while I'm trying to paint him. And we're each trying to drag the other into our worlds.*

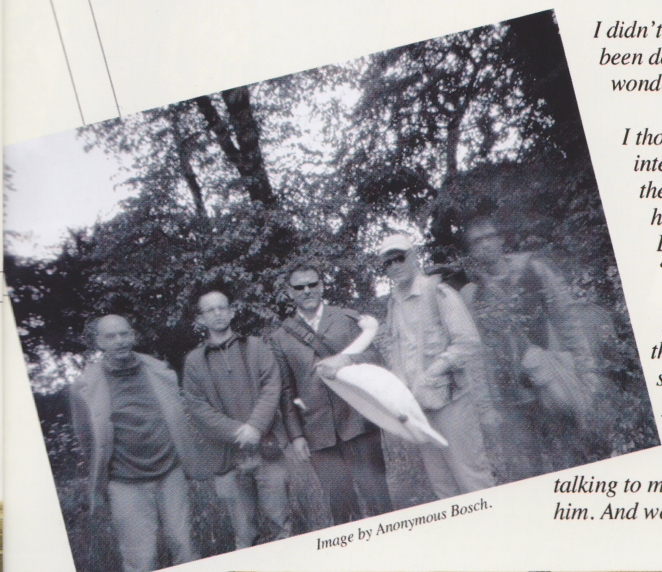


Image by Anonymous Bosch.





*He gave me the two specific Delvaux paintings he wanted. Because they'd been destroyed. That was his idea. They meant a lot to him, especially the naked girl looking at herself as a clothed figure – which I thought was badly painted, to be honest. The anatomy was bad, the folds are so childish. The concept of the wallpaper, I really disliked it.*

*I sneakily improved those paintings, because Delvaux is not a colourist. He mixed every colour with black. Or else he never washed his brushes and black got in. They're miserable old paintings with lots of skeletons. Delvaux is not one of my favourites, but Ballard admired him. I improved the colouring, now those paintings are quite nice.*

*Jim didn't detect that. He did not realise that I had made improvements. I have seen original Delvaux paintings and they are faded with a greyish tinge. Disagreeable pictures.*

*Ballard would never lend out those copies. They meant everything to him. Gradually I began to understand Delvaux's symbols. There's a clothed woman looking at herself naked in the mirror. That's what it is: Ballard, with all the festoons he brought into his life, gazing at the internal mirror where his real self is hiding. Without clothes. Naked to the world.*

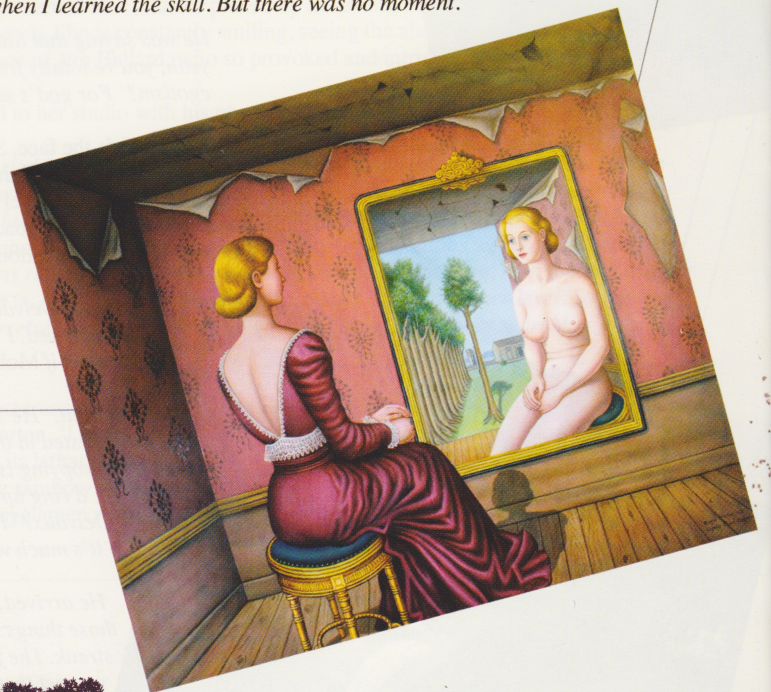
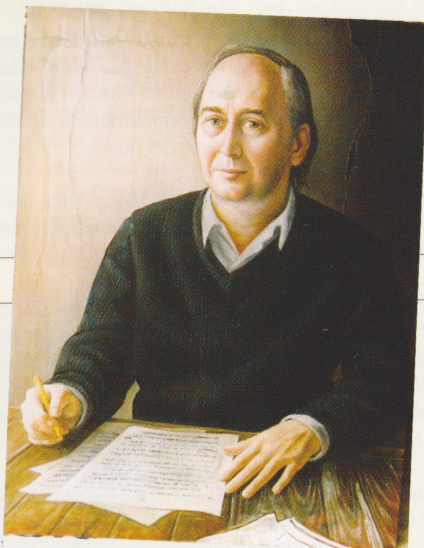
*Delvaux women have such cow-like faces. They are devoid of any real humanity. They are rubber blow-up dolls. Their faces have absolutely no expression. It's as if they are mindless bimbos. And I think that's another reason why Ballard liked them.*

*I had a convent education. And I was also very anxious to – how can I put it? – follow a path. We had a few arguments about this. Ballard had to accept that when he came to my studio, it was just for being painted. If I worked too much on the portrait, and not enough on the Delvaux, he got very angry. But if I had finished the Delvaux too early, he wouldn't have come back to let me complete the portrait.*

*I met Ballard at my spring exhibition in 1986. I started the first Delvaux in the early autumn. In the winter, after Christmas, I started the other one. It went on for quite a while, maybe two years, the whole thing.*

*He was so fascinated by art. He wouldn't let me get on with the painting. He kept saying, 'Show me some other work you've done. I want to see what you did when you were younger.'*

*I had my folder from art school, so I brought it down. He said, 'But you could already draw then. Show me something from when you were much younger.' So I had done, when I was about eight, little fairy books. There were miniscule fairies in them. Ballard looked at them. They were quite good for my age. He was very impressed. He put the books down, leaned back in the chair, and he said: 'You were born with it.' He was trying to trace it back and find a moment when I didn't have the ability to paint and then see the point when I learned the skill. But there was no moment.*





*He said, 'Could you teach me to paint?' And I said, 'Fine.' I sat him down, put up a still life – I'm a good teacher – and I said, 'Now draw the apple.' It was really funny to watch: this bold man, this bully, got a pencil in his hand, and he made a dab at the board. He did a C for the side of the apple. And then he couldn't finish it. He was frightened. He was frightened of his failure. And I said, 'It's OK, you can do a bad apple.' I said, 'There's a glass, now draw that.' 'You do it.' So I drew it. He said, 'Doesn't look like a glass.' Then, as I painted, he saw the glass coming through. He could hardly believe it. He said, 'You must teach me art.' I said, 'You'll have to come more often.' And he said, 'Couldn't you teach me by phone?'*

*He wanted to draw like an old master. He wanted to paint like Dali. When he was sitting, he would say, 'You're not to put this in. You're not to paint me like that. I suppose you're going to paint me like Hitler?'*

*I said, 'Excuse me, Jim. Do I tell you not to write like Enid Blyton?'*

*I would say something thoughtless like, 'You know in the book, War and Peace, by Tolstoy?' And he said, 'Oh, is there another one?'*

*Such a put down.*

*I told him I'd read Crash. It was the first time I saw him really embarrassed. He didn't want me to have read it. He was ashamed of it. I was very surprised. Then he said, 'Don't read that, read The Unlimited Dream Company. As if that was going to be holy writ. So I got it and I read it. And I thought it was even worse than Crash. He eats this little girl for lunch, stuff like that. Jim couldn't see that his fear of spirituality, like eating little children, was in any way peculiar.*

*He used my name in The Kindness of Women. I really resented that. The bastard, he didn't ask me. I think it was revenge.*

*I really miss his interest. He was so interested in one. And he was so intelligent. It was wonderful. People sitting for a portrait, they like the fact that you look at them with totally absorbed interest. You draw them out. That's magic. I've never experienced that before. I grew up posing for my mother. But suddenly to have a guy really interested in you and asking questions with such attention. Like you are the most interesting person in the world.*

*Ballard told me that women could be so cruel. That surprised me. He wasn't keen to have people visit Shepperton. They might barge in on something. He didn't want to curtail his fun.*

*The guy had an amazing mind, a restless, prowling, animal of a mind. Reminding me of Blake's tiger, burning bright. He actually told me that he had written Crash because he wasn't making enough money to support his children.*





*Empire of the Sun* was the best book he ever wrote. I met him after that. I met him after the book and before the film. I think people are very stupid to be angry at him for not mentioning his parents. He wrote a work of art. You wouldn't have felt the same about the boy if he had got parents with him. He was absolutely right with that decision, artistically.

Ballard was about control. The one pearl that he took out of the oyster of his life was this book, *Empire of the Sun*. He was born to write that book. He had to have those experiences. That book is a poem.

I knew Stanley Kubrick through his wife, we met at the art group. Stanley reminded me of Ballard, very much so. They shared a huge amount. The difference is that Stanley was very gentle with his women. He was a generous man. He deliberately limited his knowledge. But when he did need to know something, he was obsessive. But the two men were not unlike. They were built alike. Stanley was extremely eccentric, but he wasn't damaged. A lot went into the twisting of Ballard. He was a very jealous man.

After transcribing Marlin's tape, I went straight back to *The Kindness of Women*. And found no trace of her. There were plenty of other details I'd forgotten and a strong sense of how much the landscape of the Thames meant to Ballard, the woods and fields where he walked with his children. And the boat trip he makes with the woman who is clearly drawn from his partner, Claire Walsh.

'In the two years since Miriam's death,' he wrote, 'the familiar gardens and water-meadows had come to my rescue, but at something of a price... the quiet streets with their bricky villas, presided over by the film studios, formed the reassuring centre of my mind.'

Upstairs, in the Berkhamsted house, Marlin stood smiling for the camera, looking straight at me, while I framed the self-portrait on the wall behind her: another, younger, more troubled self; a woman with bare, powerful shoulders holding a pair of spectacles in her hand, while other discarded pairs on the edge of the shelf spurn the opportunity to reflect some surreal inner world.



Image by Anonymous Bosch.

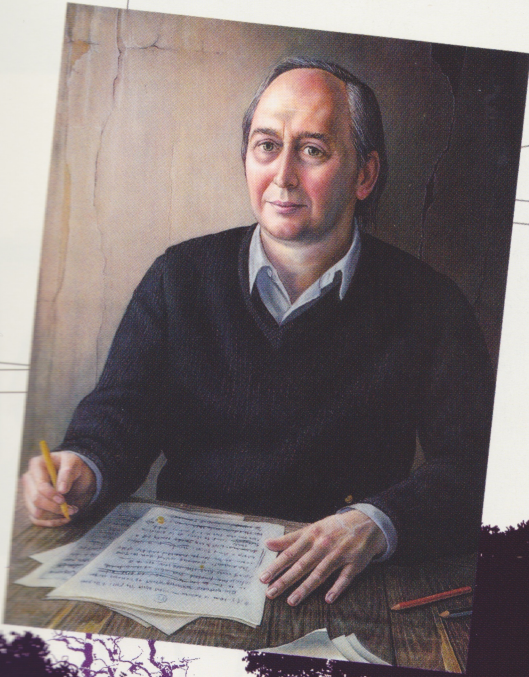




The telescoping of images, the cross-straits of the empty easel, the fields outside the window, is vertiginous. Brigid showed me a reproduction of the reproduction, the reconstituted Delvaux - which invokes Magritte, while belonging firmly in the Marlin catalogue. The nude in the gilded mirror is arranged at the same angle as Ballard in the formal portrait, which has 'disappeared' from public view, to the reserve collection of the National Portrait Gallery. The woman in the mirror is Ballard's anima, the stoic writer in a golden wig: stripped, breasted, hands resting modestly over her sex. The grain of the bare boards in the Delvaux is reprised in the texture of the wall behind Ballard and in the table on which his manuscript is spread out. Using the text of an actual Ballard script, Marlin copied some sentences, showed the revisions, and invented a calligraphy of her own to respect the mysterious process of creation. Ballard is not rewriting *Moby-Dick*, the savage epic treated as a primer for coded messages by the doomed Red Army Faction activists held in Stuttgart-Stammheim prison. The only novel to be found on the packed bookshelves of their solitary cells. In preliminary drafts of the portrait, Ballard is handleless, his torso a Francis Bacon smudge of white lines over blue. The manuscript is blank. Blood arrives in his cheeks in time for the finished version. He is trapped, interrupted, on edge. Pencil gripped, he looks like a man asked to draw a perfect apple. He is St Jerome, tempted, drawn away from his cell, seeing green England as a future desert.

I spoke to Brigid about swans, the walk I had just completed. And the swan sculpture in the conservatory, behind the chair where she sat for her lunch. 'The journey is symbolic,' she said. 'There is a pursuit and there is the running away. Maybe our whole journey is to become ready, leaving all our baggage behind.'

When I was leaving, standing at the door, she told me that I wasn't the journalist she had expected. She saw other qualities. Ballard, in *The Kindness of Women*, put it more succinctly. The unreality of waiting on a country station for the short ride back to town. 'You've been in England for eighteen years and you still look as if you've stepped off the wrong train.'



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# THERE ARE NO COMEDY GODS

BY STEWART LEE

This is the story of a spontaneous comment that got out of hand, and grew, momentarily confusing an accommodating Japanese performance art group, and, ultimately, inconveniencing a corporate arts sponsor. But it's also a story about how we value creativity. Is Art about books sold, tickets bought, and units shifted, pleasing the largest possible number of people to squeeze the maximum amount of bums on seats? Or is it rather more opaque than that? And above all, this is the story of what can happen when you drink three pints of Fosters and hit 'reply all'.

I have been a professional comedian for twenty years now. I've attended the Edinburgh Fringe Festival every year but one since 1997. I love it. I live for it. It's the best thing in my professional life, and the third best thing in my personal life. There are no curators and no programmers. You pay to enter the brochure, hire a venue, from two seats up to two thousand, and you're in for a month's slog, irrespective of supposed artistic merit or commercial prospects. Then it's up to you and your creditors. For some, the four weeks of the festival offer a glorious mess of artists of all disciplines, - theatre, dance, music, performance art and, yes, comedy, - coming together in a vast celebration that they effectively subsidise themselves because they believe it's worth it. For others it's nothing more than an ugly trade fair for stand-up comedians and micro-celebrities looking for a TV break.

The truth is, it's both these things, and more. I've shared venues with both Denise Van Outen and with a Haitian voodoo dance troupe who thought, until week 2, that Edinburgh had a military curfew. This year, there were 2,500 different shows a day, and the average audience size was 4 people. It would take six and a half years to see all these shows. In its infinite variety and intent, this massive sample can accommodate any glib generalisation you want to throw at it. There'll always be enough examples to support your theory. And long may it remain so, unique, unknowable, all things to all comers, from stag and hen parties wanting to trade insults with a punchy comic, to bold aesthetes seeking out bald Polish physical theatre ensembles.

The worst thing about the Fringe, apart from the insurmountable debts incurred by the majority of performers and the promoters and agents that exploit these debts, enslaving the foolish turns for years to come, is the Comedy Awards, chosen by an increasingly powerful committee of mysterious experts, and supposedly





ensuring the recipient career-making exposure. Established in 1981, these were formerly known as The Perrier Awards, but the sponsors quit in 2005, perhaps as a result of performer protests about World Health Organisation condemnation of the their parent company Nestle's developing world practices. "There's the other 48 weeks of the year for politics," said the committee's head, a successful West End promoter called Nica Burns, when challenged on the WHO's statistics of 1.5 million child deaths annually as a result of Nestle's infant milk formula.

This year the awards have hooked up with Foster's, a beer brand currently seeking to align itself with laughs generally, via sponsorship of all Channel 4 comedy and the proposed generation of original on-line comedy content. For, as Heineken UK Brands director Mark Given said on the awards' website in a typically Orwellian statement, "Comedy plays a singularly important role in the lives of Foster's consumers and we look forward to facilitating and fostering their engagement with comedy in all its guises."

Ever since their inception the exact criteria of eligibility for the awards has been elusive and changeable, yet the possibility of snagging the now £10,000 prize money is what encourages some of the 700 or so comedy shows in the fringe to rationalise their potential losses. In the eighties and early nineties your eligibility

was apparently decided by Nica Burns on a whim. Since then ever-shifting rules, about the size of audience the act normally plays to, about their degree of television exposure, limit the field, the awards' parameters always lagging behind public taste, cultural trends and advances in technology. This year's panel prize winner, a young American called Bo Burnham, doesn't have his own TV show, but he has 65 million hits to his YouTube videos on the internet, which is a kind of computerised TV young people watch these days. You get the idea.

For me, the worst thing about the awards is the way the inevitable media coverage reduces what I believe to be the greatest arts event in the world into some kind of competition, an event which can be won, and how this conspires to suggest that Nica Burns is some kind of spokesperson for the Fringe, which thrives precisely because it is not regulated. Playing up the awards' importance in the wider scheme of things, this year Nica Burns issued a statement pointing out that sixteen of her previous 170 or so nominees are now stadium-filling success stories. But most aren't. Some, like Johnny Immaterial, gave up. Some, such as Daniel Kitson and Will Adamsdale, fled the uncomfortable exposure the awards gave them. Some, such as Emma Thompson, disassociated themselves from the awards during the Nestle years. And many, such as David O'Doherty or Phil Nicol or Arnold Brown, have produced much brilliant work since, untroubled by stadium sized acclaim or significant financial reward. It's a numbers game, and a show of sixteen unqualified commercial successes is so likely statistically as to tell us nothing about the awards' predictive abilities, but to reduce the Fringe, and Edinburgh in August, to the notion of a petri dish to grow jokes for the stadium gigs of tomorrow seems stupid and soulless at best, and at worst deliberately cynical.

Worse still, Nica Burns' approach encourages the idea that the Edinburgh Fringe is something artists pass through, on the way to being 'discovered', rather than something that can be enjoyed and participated in for its own sake, because it is superb. "I wouldn't imagine Al Murray would need to come here any more", said a visiting acquaintance this Summer, surprised at the pub landlord's self-esteem seeking appearance in a small venue at lunchtime. Call me bitter if you must, but this revealed, unambiguously, the perception that those of us still playing the fringe were second rate losers wasting our time, a perception the idea of Art As Competition fostered by the Foster's awards encourages.

Being a judge on the Edinburgh Comedy Awards committee must be increasingly difficult. Way back in the 1980s comedy was yet to be the New Rock And Roll (TM Janet Street-Porter 1992), and nobody knew comedians might one day play stadiums, so it was easier for the judges to follow their hearts in handing out their unasked for gongs. Thirty years on, the idea that comedy in a massive space may constitute a night out, facilitated by exposure afforded to acts by prime-time career-making shows like Michael McIntyre's Road Show, means that the critics on the Comedy Awards Committee are expected to act as all-seeing Cassandras, pointing people towards the next John Bishop, whose journey from Pleasance Courtyard Portakabin to football stadium size stardom, via some McIntyre TV gigs, took less than a year.





Undoubtedly, it was a slice of this high-profile exposure by association that sold Foster's on the idea of sponsoring the then orphaned awards. That and that fact that "comedy plays a singularly important role in the lives of Foster's consumers", laughing all the way from the drip-tray to the urinal. But somebody, it would seem, wasn't prepared to wait for this year's winner to become a future star, and wanted to hitch the new sponsor's brand to a big name immediately, and in the last week of July the public were invited to vote on-line for an all-time Comedy God, drawn from nearly three hundred individual past award nominees in nearly 200 shows, some explicitly named, some under the names of the shows they won with, the majority of whom there is no video evidence of for the conscientious voter who didn't perhaps attend the last 30 Edinburgh Fringes to check, and none of whom presumably were asked if they minded their names being used to drive traffic to a Foster's site. The way public polls work, whichever former nominee was currently the best known comic in Britain with internet users, probably Michael McIntyre or Russell Howard, would win the spurious poll, and the new sponsor would be happy to have their profile raised by association, at the expense of hundreds of other artists, none of whom agreed to be part of a Foster's marketing exercise.

I got in just after midnight on Monday July 19th, and found someone had copied on to me by e-mail a badly punctuated press release announcing the Foster's awards' devious All-Time Comedy-God award plan. I had drunk three pints, ironically of Foster's, having done a set in a central London club and then stayed to watch Greg Davies' act. Incensed by the press release, which had been sent out to the great and the good in the entertainment world, I wrote an instant and furious critique, calling the organisers 'morons', 'illiterates' and 'whores', and suggesting that Frank Chickens, a Japanese performance art duo nominated for the Perrier in 1984, when the awards were a rather less commercial proposition, might arguably be the best act on the list, but would not get any votes because the public hadn't heard of them. To my mind, the Fringe is the work of many hands over many years, most of them unpaid, and it wasn't for Foster's to walk in at the eleventh hour and claim a stake in thirty years of comedy by a public poll so poorly thought out as to offer a predictably safe victor. Then I pressed 'reply all'. If I'd only had two pints of Foster's I wouldn't have had the guts, and if I'd had four I wouldn't have been sober enough to do it. But, the next morning when I awoke, I found that the three pint rant had sudden and unexpected consequences.

Firstly, the Foster's Comedy Awards' publicist Anna Arthur contacted my agents and said that because I had used the word 'whore' I was a misogynist and that they would make sure everyone knew what kind of a person I was. I was happy to issue an apology, in an email which I entitled *Whore Clarification*. "To clarify my use of the word 'whore' I wasn't using it in a sexual or sexist sense, but in the commonly understood metaphorical sense of 'corporate whore'. I think this is clear to anyone reading the piece. I didn't have Anna and Nica specifically in mind, but was thinking of everyone involved with the awards over their 30-year history from top to bottom, including all the sponsors, judges, administrators, nominees, winners, and anyone who has ever attended the awards shows, irrespective of their gender." The matter was then dropped.

Secondly, though I don't have a Twitter account, as the only time I searched for myself on the Twitter site I was disturbed to see my f-list celebrity movements around the country essentially being updated by unpaid spies the length of breadth of the land, the Twitterverse got hold of the Frank Chickens' cause. Nudged by the followers of the comedians Richard Herring and Robin Ince, the internet swiftly voted Frank Chickens to the top of the All-Time Comedy God poll, ahead of even Michael McIntyre. It appeared that corporate money might be used to highlight Frank Chickens' founder Kazuko Hoki's three decade career of idiosyncratic multi-media live-art, rather than cementing the easy fit with an already wealthy and famous chat show friendly stand-up that Foster's might have preferred, a much better representation of the true spirit of the fringe.

Unbeknownst to me, Frank Chickens had recently reformed and Kazuko Hoki professed herself bewildered by the whole campaign, as she did not consider herself a comedian or know who Michael McIntyre was, which was of course perfect. She even assumed that the bizarre looking musical genius Tim Minchin, then second in the poll, was actually a non-existent person, also made up by disgruntled voters. Fairly quickly, Foster's gilded their voting website with various passwords and gateways, but Frank Chickens remained the people's choice throughout August, a nagging story underscoring the main PR thrust of the awards themselves that refused to go away. I was offered dozens of opportunities to speak about the accidental campaign on local and national news shows, but declined all but the most insistent, instead allowing events to take their course.

On the 18th of August, as an extra show on top of the month run I was doing in the 150 seater room at the Stand, I had a one-off show in the Festival Theatre and asked Frank Chickens, now an 18-piece mega-ensemble, if they would consider closing the show, after Franz Ferdinand had played a selection of hits. Frank Chickens accepted, graciously under the circumstances, and were pleasingly superb – surreal, joyous and entirely free of cynicism, the perfect antidote to the Foster's awards. The whole thing couldn't have been better if it had been planned. Which it wasn't, despite the Foster's awards people's suggestions.

The All-Time Comedy God was supposed to be announced on Saturday August 28th, alongside the £10 000 winner of the annual award, which this year was Russell Kane, who is managed by Avalon, a company which recently got *The One Show's* Christine Bleakly four million pounds for transferring from the BBC to ITV, resulting in questions in parliament. Instead, the All Time Comedy God was announced late the following afternoon, after the Fringe was over and after Monday's papers had been put to bed, to minimize coverage of Frank Chickens' victory. The All Time Comedy God award was now reamed "The Foster's Funny Four", and the low-key press release featured gimmicky advertising-style portraits of the four poll-toppers – Michael McIntyre, Russell Howard, Tim Minchin and Kazuko – made from crushed Foster's cans. Under the circumstances, this took on an ugly resonance, like branding a disobedient slave to teach them a lesson. Foster's, presumably still unable to comprehend the exact nature of the opposition to them, had made their winners' actual human faces into beer adverts.

Foster's position on Kazuko's win was that it was 'evidence of the British sense of humour'. But it wasn't. It was 30 000 people who had had enough, just for once, of the bullshit that surrounds us every day, the bread and circuses, cheapening everything, turning everything sour. I haven't been in touch with Kazuko since her face was made into a massive Foster's advert, presumably allowable on the basis of something she signed about her likeness for the awards committee nearly three decades ago, and I hope she isn't upset by this turn of events. But there's something brilliant about it, her face, fixing you with the flinty and yet playful glare of a true artist, while McIntyre laughs light-ent style, and Russell Howard and Tim Minchin look indie-rock moody.

Without wishing to downplay the amount of effort thousands of heroic cyber-nerds all around the world put in, it was comparatively easy for the public to sabotage the stupid Foster's poll. The kids had on their side a number of things that are an anathema to The Man, for it is he, in his world of inane corporate speak, his shit-trough of marketing disguised as philanthropy. In short, the kids had wit, intelligence, taste and honesty. And a communications network that bypasses the mediated information we are usually fed, the advertisers' lies, the PR people's spin, the news wank. But Frank Chickens' victory was a happy and unplanned accident. Imagine what we could do if we put our minds to it. Something superb. Probably.



# OFF HIS MEDS-





# HAPPY

## THE ECO CHAMBER

### happiness

by Dave Hamilton

**E**ver gone hungry in your life? I don't mean skipped a meal or gone on a diet, I mean have you had absolutely nothing to eat, perhaps even for days in a row and had no means of getting any food? Have you ever struggled to find clean water or walked for miles just to get some? Have you watched a family member die of a minor medical condition because you couldn't get them to a hospital?

There are billions around the world who would answer yes to at least one, if not all of these questions. However, for those of us in the 'Developed' world it is unlikely we would have suffered in this way at any time in our lives.

How about one more question...

...have you ever been depressed?

I'm guessing the answer to this one is more likely to be a yes. Roughly 1 in 10 people in the UK and USA are currently being treated for depression. True figures are perhaps a lot higher than this as many either don't recognise the fact that they are clinically unhappy or they don't want the social stigma associated with being diagnosed with a depressive illness.

So why are we all so fucking miserable?

Well perhaps it isn't our fault; we just live in a society that gears itself up that way, one that belittles us and makes us feel inadequate. Turn on the TV, watch a DVD, pick up a glossy magazine or go on the internet and you'll be bombarded with images of people better looking, richer and more accomplished than you are. Consciously or not, through advertising, we are told our lives are somehow incomplete without these shiny trinkets, we're too fat or too thin, we're ugly and we lead pointless meaningless lives.

But no-one leads a pointless life, except maybe the judges of TV talent shows.

The trouble is the media lets us believe the pursuit of wealth and accumulation of material goods will lead to happiness and fulfilment. They portray the perfect house with the perfect family full of all the things that will make your shitty life all the better.

"Why not get that widescreen TV? You can afford it, hell you DESERVE IT!"

"Not getting laid? Maybe that's because your armpits smell of your natural pheromones. Why not mask it with new jungle scented toxo-spray?"

They create a desire and then create a product to fill it; you don't need this thing but if you are led to believe it will get you laid, improve your social standing, your job prospects or, in short, make you happier than you are now, you may really want it!

Yet, there will always be something you don't have or someone with more than you. I have a friend who has never had to work a single day in his life. His parents give him everything he would ever want, including a camper van, a car, holidays, they pay for any college course he wishes to attend and recently they even bought him his own house! He's approaching 40 and he's completely and utterly miserable. At first I envied the easy life he seemed to lead but the more I got to know him the more I wouldn't wish his existence on anyone. As Ed Diener, psychologist for the University of Illinois and happiness researcher says, "Materialism is toxic for happiness".

Nestled between Tibet and India, sat straddling the most Eastern stretch of the Himalayas lies a small, landlocked country, known locally as Druk-Yul, or Bhutan to you and me. Bhutan isn't very well off as a nation - its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is less than half that of the island of Guernsey, despite it having ten times the population. Yet, Bhutan has a wealth of a very different kind as the inhabitants of this small, rather isolated country have realised this toxic association with money and happiness. Rather than measure their own success in economic terms or the GDP, they instead have come to observe a measure of individual, national and environmental well being or Gross National Happiness.



# ON VES

In Bhutan they have realised that material development is not an adequate measure of growth, it is not people centred nor is it balanced. Consider these two scenarios: in the first, someone walks through a town centre with a sign saying free hugs embracing any willing passers-by. In the other, that same person buys a gun, shoots out some shop windows which are later looted, and shoots a few passers-by, before turning the gun on himself.

The first scenario may well cheer a few people up but, in terms of the economy, bar the price of the materials needed for the 'free hugs' sign, the hugger won't really contribute anything financially or increase GDP.

The gunman on the other hand will help to employ gun and bullet manufacturers, glaziers, insurance companies, journalists and medical professionals, contributing greatly to the local and national economy.

The genius of the Bhutanese system is that it recognises this disparity, this mad imbalance between trying to improve either the economy or the well-being of its citizens. They recognise that constant economic growth is always at the expense of something or someone else, usually either the environment or another individual.

Any proposed policy in Bhutan takes this into account and it must pass a GNH review to judge its impact on such things as the environment, or on the physical, social, and mental wellness of the population as a whole. For example the country stopped its profitable trade in exported timber as it found it to be causing erosion on the nation's hillsides. Could you imagine if BP had that foresight before the deepwater oil disaster? How much misery would have been saved?

The Bhutanese are truly fortunate people as they have a government that looks out for each of them and takes care of their environment. In our individualistic society we are not so lucky. The environment is something precious few seem to care about and socially, spiritually and morally we are left to take care of ourselves.

I really felt this a couple of years ago when a very close friend, one I'd known since I was at school, brutally committed suicide by jumping in front of a train. It was like a comet had crashed into my world sending shock waves flying through everyone who knew him. I was devastated, I didn't know how to react, I was angry, hurt and for a good few months, drunk.

Around six months after the event, on the advice of a house-mate (for whom I'd no doubt become unbearable company) I began to volunteer by helping teach creative writing to a group of adults with learning difficulties. I walked into the class which was already in session, crept into a chair and sat down as the class read out their poems from the week before. Sat opposite me was a guy with wild staring eyes and a wild blonde afro to match, who, to protect his identity, I'll call Karl. He was physically quite tall but his presence seemed to stretch beyond the physical. You knew when you were sharing a room with him. I had no idea what to expect from this guy as it came to his turn. The two last poems had been about Dr Who and a trip to the park. Members of the class had all given praise for these two simplistic gems and I soon found this was the main ethos of the class - to offer positive comments, why they liked the poems, rather than criticism. What came from Karl didn't require any sugar coated comments and it still stands as the most powerful piece of performance poetry I've ever witnessed.

His epic prose spoke of a serious road accident he'd had a few years previously that had left him with a quite major head injury. It went into harrowing yet exquisite detail as he recalled the impact, the time his life had changed forever and how his parents had dealt with this profound change in their only son.

I couldn't get this performance out of my head for days and when it finally left my thoughts I'd realised my depression had gone with it.

This event had taken me out of myself - I was looking at the world with someone else's eyes, no longer full of self-indulgent self-pity, I realised there was more to life than just moping around the house or getting pissed. In short when I started to think about something other than myself, I became happy.

It made me realise that perhaps no-one is intrinsically unhappy. We may be trapped in our own thoughts from time to time but, if we are given a chance to escape them we can be released from the miserable prison we may make ourselves. The focus has to shift from how we can materially gain ourselves to how we may improve our environment or make a difference to someone else's life or society as a whole. If we all begin to think about others then we all benefit. If we carry on thinking about just ourselves then everybody loses.

# ADAL





## Oh Bondage Up Yours! by Melinda Gebbe

**M**elinda Ger Rouge...in a livid state après divorce I let my murderous persona take precedence over my life. Through a connection in San Francisco I found much needed employment on this side of the pond. With a tireless ageing party girl I shall call Miss O, who ran a little operation which organised data on the Sado-Masochism and Bondage events scene; a world-wide calendar of bondage and domination, or B'n'D B'n'Bs.

The calendar also included whipping weekends, leather balls, rubber balls, Babe'n'Buggy races, second skin fashion shows and all other things chained and gimpy-full. She had a small side-concession which called itself a sort of charity for the disabled. Her people ran a bus up to wheelchair-bound, legally blind or otherwise differently-abled men who were in sore need of sexual attention; gave them vehicular transport and the necessary cash for a roll with a sex worker, but often, they reported in confidentiality, no transport home.

But that's a horse of a different colour. Imagine, if you will, 1980's Soho. For those old enough to remember it, Soho was once a bustling underbelly full of basement clubs that featured ladies dressed as sequinned yums yums, cordoned off from the sweating public much as lions with a chair. That was the fifties. In the 80's it was cleaned up. Nothing to see here, just drink your drinks and go home-unless you want a touch of jazz at Ronnie Scott's or feel you want to join a little drinking club like the Seven Dials, dance a bit at the Empire on Tottenham Court Road or at the Oxford Street 100 Club (just downstairs from my brief employ at Band M Animation, as it happened).

Dance clubs were coming into the fore. The Colony, where the old dame in residence would refer to you as "Cunty" if she liked the cut of your jib, had dispersed into particulates of Irish Mist; motes of the permanent luminal landscape of Great Old London, now out of reach of the hurting hands of Time; captured in its snow globe of memory, always with Francis Bacon, ghastly in whiteface, speaking slurred Polare with other kippered habitués long past closing time forever and ever amen...

This new eighties London longed to hustle. It wasn't satisfied any longer with the meagre pleasures of its grandparent city. It was growing shark's teeth, dealing deals, hooking up with Richie Rich playmate Amerika, trying to impress prosperous economies like Japan and West Germany, who knew how to build industrial complexes like Frankfurt; a city that looked as if it had been formed from enormous robot dog turds.



The Japanese were more opaque in their business practices than the Germans. Still, there was a blatant and very interesting hobby of Japanese gentlemen which the British businessman could understand and emulate. A practice which could be discussed in a civilised setting over dinner and drinks which would get the mutual sense of camaraderie flowing at an assured and successful pace with any Gaijin, or "round-eye" and his new Nipponese counterpart. I'm referring, of course, to the dubious and symbolically misogynistic "art" of bondage.

I was shocked when my then partner and I (a rock journalist and an editor on a fetish magazine) were invited to a business lunch with a high-flown rep from a certain musical instrument company from Japan, when, before we could even raise our cups of sake to him in respectful "Campai", the man had whipped out a collection of brightly illustrated booklets which he spread on the dining table, all of which featured naked Oriental girls swinging shyly from red twisting ropes which held them like seasoned pheasants, in what I deemed to be incredibly humiliating positions. He had a lot of nerve showing another man this kind of sexist rubbish in front of me as if I were bloody invisible! Did he think I was some kind of prostitute!? That I would find delectation in seeing these poor girls strung up for some lascivious photographer? I couldn't figure out what to do. We had just been invited, via his company to visit Japan. These two men had been friends for a few years now. Reader, I kept shtum.

It wasn't as if I hadn't seen plenty of costumed fetish antics via the shady Miss O. I just hadn't been prepared for the casual display of such savage and expertly merciless bondage material in such a formal setting, where I believed we were supposed to act with the utmost decorum. This gentleman obviously felt he had not crossed any bounds of taste whatsoever. He might as well have been showing us a picture of a glazed ham. I suppose I was unprepared to be staring at this kind of thing perched on top of a brocade serviette where a nicely dressed waitress might see it and feel sick to her stomach.

The bondage scene in those days was a furtive one. That was part of the frisson. It was usually held in grubby little clubs which would give over a space once a month to a specially titled venue like Der Putsch, where the lighting was reddish, and there was an overwhelming pong of rubber, hairspray (to keep the rubber shiny shiny) and the vague oleaginous niff of Vaseline. There were shadowy booths where monkeyshines of Berlinesque proportions were enacted and a predictable series of fetish hits played on a loop; the most obvious being Carmina Burana, Venus in Furs and Nancy Sinatra's one hit other than "The Incest Song".

These were great arenas in which to act out our secret selves. When I first began to attend these play-parties in the dark I felt a rush of forbidden exaltation at the thought that I might at last get to meet the woman behind the mask of my own devising. I was extremely disappointed to discover that I was not a fabulous hydra of unending revenge, but only a torn-up ex-wife who liked dressing up in fantastic clingy gear which included thigh-high patent-leather boots, red PVC jumpsuits, belts studded with big nails and black Mae West wet look rubber mermaid dresses. I didn't want to have my boots licked by a quaking self-styled slave. I just wanted to be loved and respected. Very boring for the would-be slave I moved in with.







Mr. T was quite respectful at first. He couldn't do enough for me. Then, when he realised that I wouldn't be looping chains around him and leaving him to do a Houdini all by himself on the bed for hours of what he considered quality time alone, he became bitchy and petulant. I've heard it said that there is nothing sadder than a masochist who can't get a sadist to do to him what he wants. This man, who had seemed so sexually drawn to me, didn't want me intimately at all. He wanted me to dress up, whack him with my little silver-handled riding crop, and then leave him clattering like Marley's ghost wearing a pair of black spandex tights and stainless steel... Ooh! How exciting!

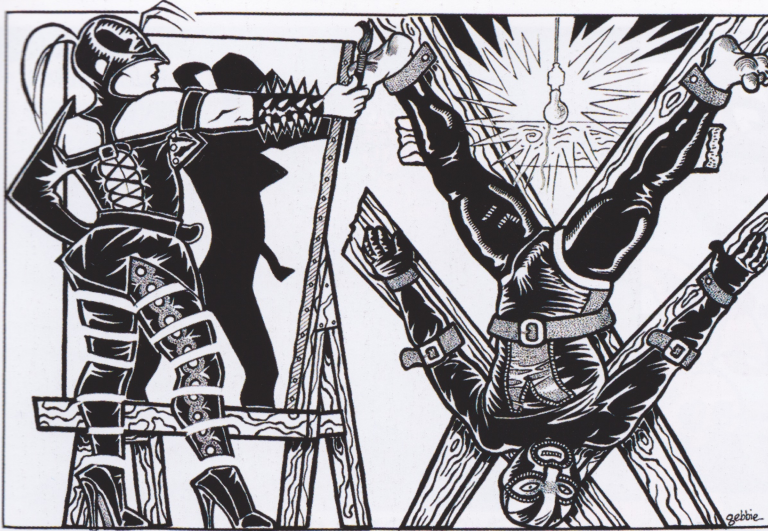
Not! He got me damn mad with his frustrating and pointless fetish theatre productions and I finally blew up. "I'll beat you now," I warned, and chased him around the bed like a Benny Hill extra. He neither found me amusing or stimulating and our sojourn into the world of the Torture Garden came to an end. Before I had exhausted my curiosity, I also sampled the delights of a male psychiatric nurse who was erotically attracted to rubber galoshes; a heavy metal drummer who liked twisting women's nipples, a triathlon athlete who got me to pick out his drag clothes for him and then accompany him to dinner where waiters would call him a queer and then get beaten by him at arm-wrestling, and then, weirdest of all, a tiny man I met on the train began stalking me, and told me I must marry him because he was magic and had a special role to play in the murder of a bad man who didn't believe in fairies. This geezer came to the fetish clubs as well. He showed me a guitar he said Ron Wood of the Rolling Stones had given him. I had to hit him over the head with it to get him to stop following me.

There was an older guy who came to all the club nights dressed like the Evil Ming in Flash Gordon. He used to hand out questionnaires to all the women he considered dominant in the club. I was one of them, apparently, based more on my humourless expression, than my "butch" ways. His theory was that so-called "dominant" women had more testosterone in their systems than regular women and so they behaved like men. Typical psychiatry student. If he'd had any insight at all, he would have seen me for the screaming Nellie I really was.

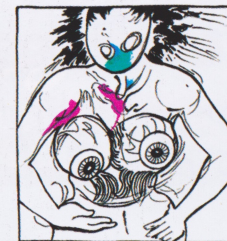
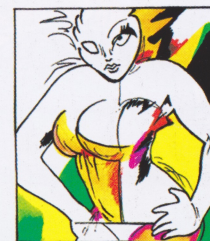
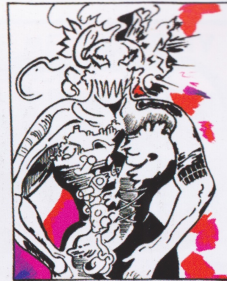
We see what we want to see. All we ever do is reveal ourselves - in everything we do. There is a saying in Texas - "Most people are about as obvious as a cat scratching shit on marble". Even when we are play-acting we are still trying to communicate our needs. I found the fetish scene of the London eighties thrilling at first; dramatic, full of pulpy, dated and nasty grandeur. I particularly liked the fact that unbelievably sexy men had so eagerly clustered around me, dressed not in drab stone-washed jeans, but in tight vinyl skirts, net stockings, pointy, sexy boots, black leathers, and, even more wonderfully, their eyes were outlined in kohl and their lips were rouged.

I imagined these wonderful creatures were playing the most erotically-charged bird of paradise dance. They pre-dated Goth by twenty years. This was good old fashioned dirty perversion - the kind of thing I used to daydream about when I watched Marlon Brando swagger about in a sweaty vest, howling to be caressed by his woman, in 'Streetcar Named Desire' when I was fifteen.





PROMELLA KNEW THAT SOONER OR LATER SHE'D HAVE TO TELL GERALD SHE COULDN'T PAINT



It took a while for me to understand what the games were all about. Indeed, it took a while for me to understand my own games. Once I began to see a pattern of predictability occurring, I could anticipate the outcome of almost any interaction that I cared to observe. The once-exotic scene of a dominant man drawing blood from the bottom of his submissive partner's buttock while he drew a happy-face on it with a needle came to look like stupid cruelty - not feverish love play.

A young, diminutive blonde chained to her own ankle while her sadist for the evening ignored her as he flicked cigarette ash into her hair began to look pathetic; especially since I came to realise that she had a different, bored partner each week, and that being called upon to be dominant means doing all the work while your "slave" just wallows in the abuse they have meticulously orchestrated. Girls who chose to wear trays on chains bulldog-clipped to their nipples, or who pulled little donkey-carts with bits between their teeth had specifically fancied these roles. More often than not they were public-school educated, as opposed to their "doms", who were largely working class. Why did these girls look so happy and flushed?

It was a puzzle that took me months to crack. For my own part, although I loved dressing tough, I didn't much fancy giving it any elbow grease. More and more, I was having to come up with excuses as to why I wouldn't whip an eager "sub" male, no matter who he was. I couldn't make myself hurt someone else physically. Certainly not without reason, although I whacked one particular meat-headed "dom" for being a flaming asshole, and was quite surprised when he didn't hit me back, but put me off by asking me to "do it again, I like it".

I watched with pity, on several occasions, a labour-toughened old guy who used to take on several women in an evening's span; his wrists in stocks, his back bare, while they flayed him to beefsteak, all the while moaning and sweating and flinching in some kind of messed-up ecstasy. All I knew about him was that he'd been a merchant marine when he was young.

This scene, like any scene began to get stale through constant reiteration with very little deviation, as it were. I finally came to the realization that all of these scenarios were not about the excitement of seeing in the end, the genuine article, the great and revealed human form unclothed and accessible in all its vulnerability and delicious tenderness, but that for this crowd, the boots, the whips, the chains, the bruises, the humiliation, the stocks, the racks, the ball cocks, the gags, the locks, were what they had instead of sex.

Divorce had distressed and even temporarily scarred me, but not to the point where I couldn't tell the difference between the freedoms of pleasure and the need to control or be controlled. We already get lashing of that crap on the shop floor. I still like the outfits, but I'm disappointed in squeamishness beneath the gear. It's an empty dance, the power-play tango.

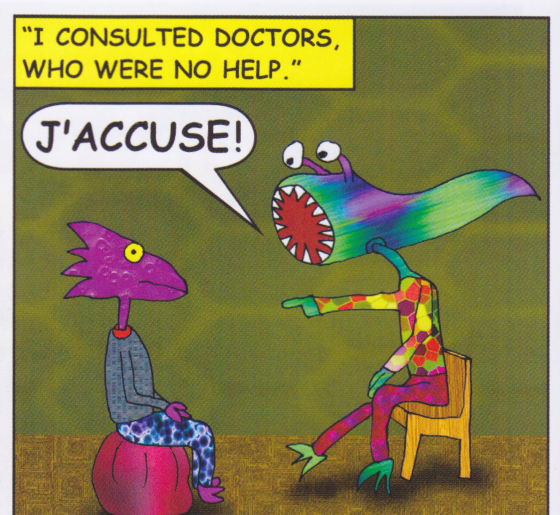
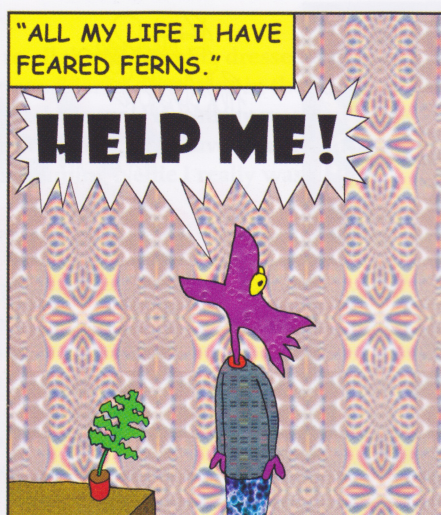
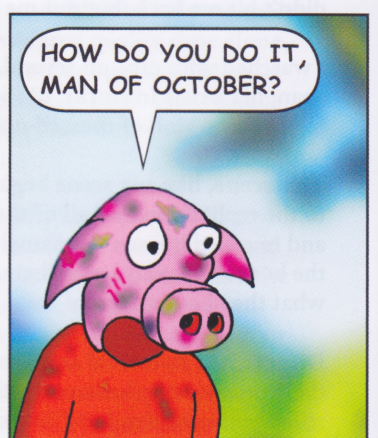
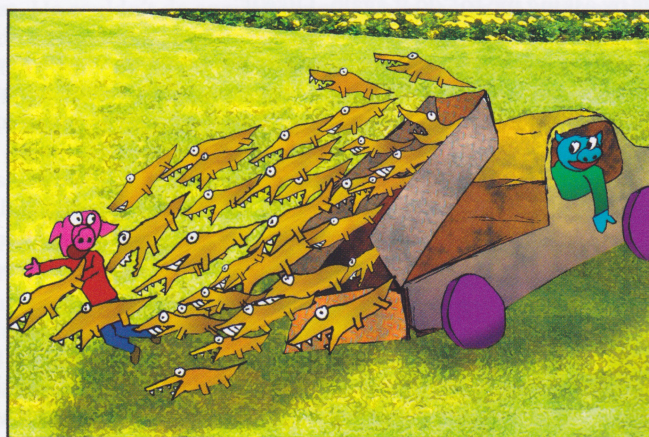
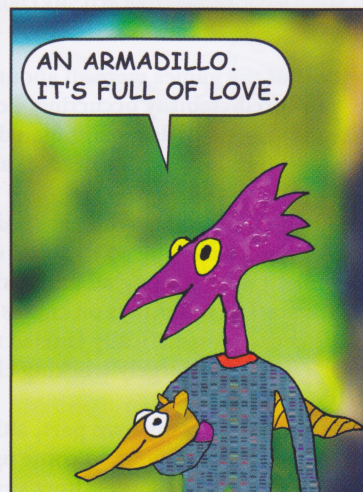
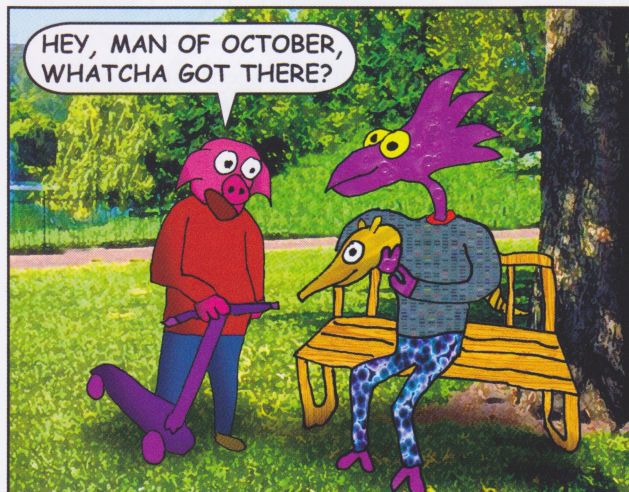
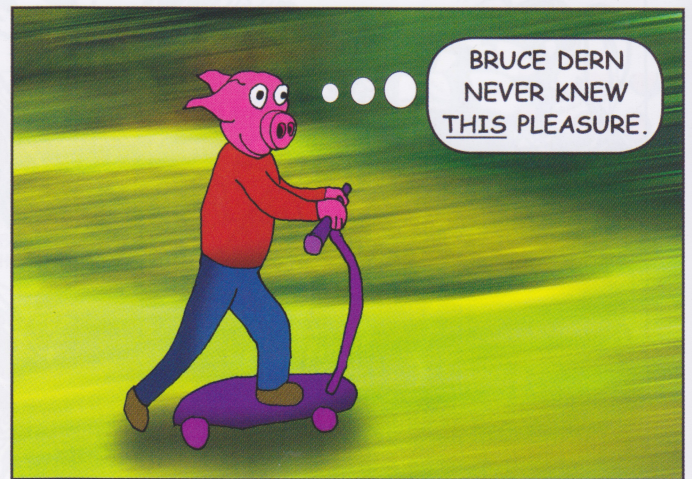




**GET THAT THING  
AWAY FROM ME**

**ARMADILLO  
OVERLOAD**

**STEVE AYLETT**





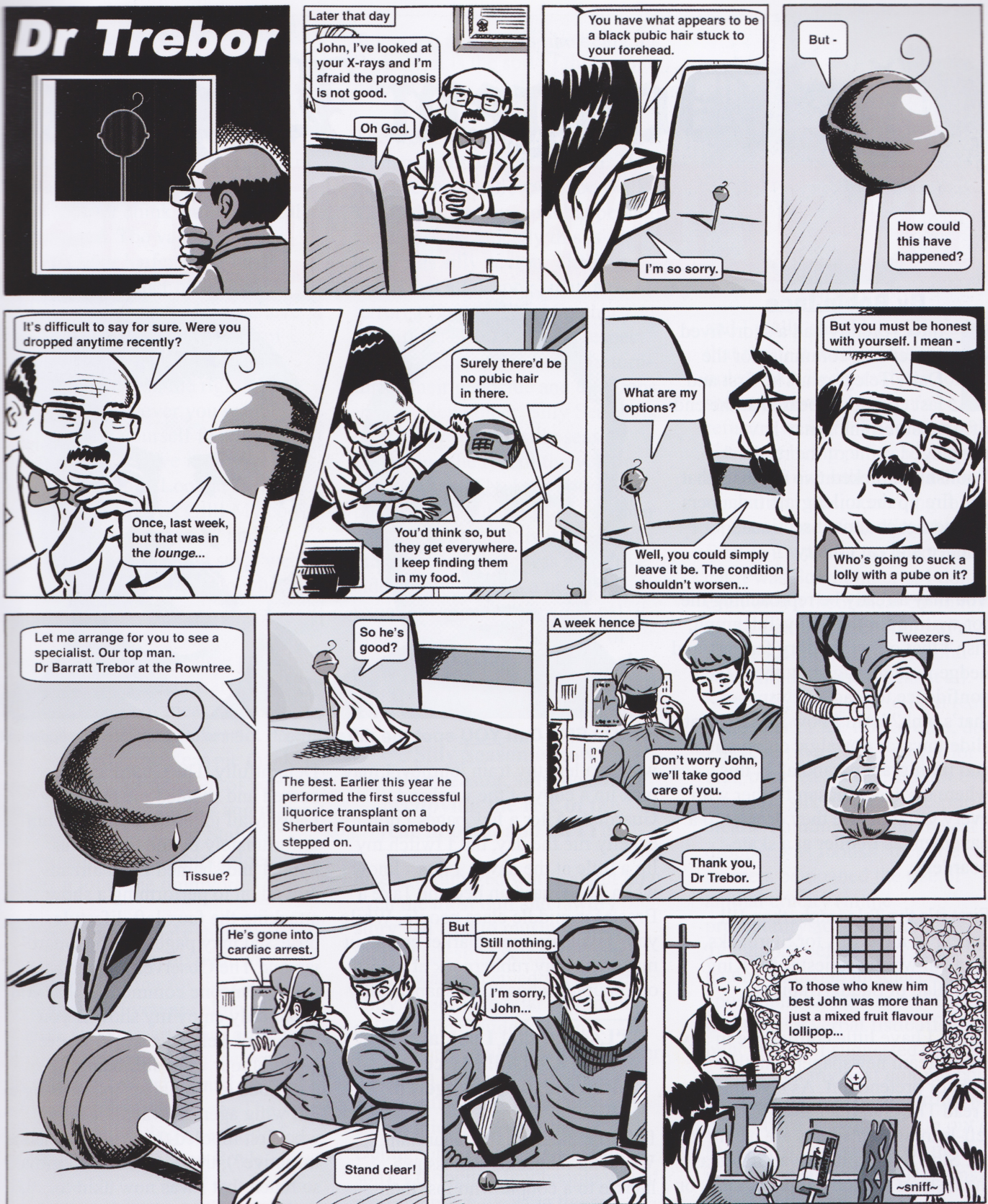
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# Dr Trebor



## Crystal Meth and flistair

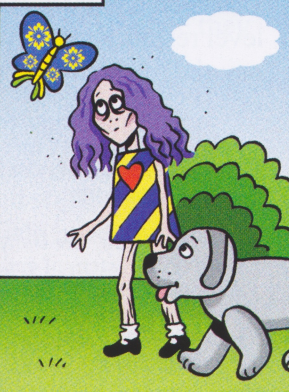
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by Lee Healey & Barney Farmer



# The Dodgem Logical

## MY STALINIST TENDENCIES

By Robin Ince

I have recently had a short-lived career as a columnist for the Daily Telegraph. The first and last column appeared at the end of August. I think I may have misjudged some of the readership. Foolishly, I picked two subjects that can fire up the toilet graffiti daubers of internet comment sections; science and cat cruelty.

You may already be reproaching me for writing for the Daily Telegraph, "isn't that only for angry farmers and hedge fund managers without the confidence to read a newspaper that's pink?" Am I now making that slide towards nostalgic colonialism and immigrant paranoia? Is this where my teeth loosen further with every grind before they drop onto a pavement as I holler at a skateboarder?

First it's the Telegraph, then I'll appear in an advert for Starbucks, then I'll work as a jester for King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

Sadly, I have little confidence in any mainstream newspaper, whether right or pretend left. As a young man I read The Guardian as all left-leaning comedians are meant to do. Slowly the allure evaporated as the fashion section widened. Only on Saturdays would I have the alibi that I was buying it for The Guide, but then I stopped watching TV, so that was it<sup>1</sup>. Every now and again, on the



HARD LEFT: Can YOU spot the difference?



Photo of Citizen Ince: Jon Appleyard

way to a lengthy train journey, I may pick up a copy of the weekend Guardian. After a few pages I don't exactly rue the day, but I twitch my lip a little at the dawn. I don't know when The Guardian became Take a Break for middle class people. While your favourite supermarket checkout magazine may rubberneck at incestuous couples whose odd-shaped baby

**"Look at me! Look at me!  
I'm AA Gill! My cock  
destroys the endangered"**

fell off a balcony, the Guardian Weekend magazine can issue a hankie to a couple who lost their maze to Dutch elm disease the same year their daughter received poor A level results and had to go to Portsmouth University via clearing.

Delightfully, The Guardian once named and shamed me for doing Daily Mail jokes<sup>2</sup> (quite true), but unfortunately by the time I was named and shamed I had already moved on to performing a show attacking the faux left, lifestyle obsessed inky pages of The Guardian and The Observer<sup>3</sup>. After that show, someone commented that you could only enjoy my show if you were hard Left. In a world where New Labour were still being described as 'socialists' possessing a left wing agenda (wasn't it Lenin who first mooted the Private Finance Initiative?), the goalposts had moved so much that I was now akin to Arthur Scargill in the mind of one audience member<sup>4</sup>. I was hard left? A man who reads the Morning Star over a croissant in the Waitrose

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Instead of contemporary TV I have a carefully collated DVD library of Whicker's World, Face to Face, World in Action and other deceased programmes. While some are watching Alan Carr's Chatty Man with Jedward, I am enjoying John Freeman interviewing Edith Sitwell.

<sup>2</sup> My favourite was "I went to the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition the other day, turns out their ideal home was a thatched

cottage surrounded by barbed wire with a gun turret and a sign saying "no blacks, no Irish, No Dogs"

<sup>3</sup> oh I also liked "the Daily Mail's reporters work on a system of eating a large amount of blue cheese and then whatever they dream is written up as truth 'Gypsies Rewarded with Old Widow's house for doing Really Big Rape'"

<sup>4</sup> another example of just how banal it has all become was watching Question Time, the final TV show before I gave up with modern broadcasts, had the political philosopher Kelvin Mackenzie on. While debating Gaza, Mckenzie declared that he didn't know what the fuss about imports was, according to the Financial Times the markets of Gaza had too many Snickers in them. That's how you judge democracy, the accessibility to cheap confectionary.



Café? Oh yes, the revolution will be televised, but only after I have chosen my organic jam. Once you are deemed to be on the left, the people don't bother looking at the beam in their eye, they spend their lives scrutinizing you, finding every armour chink and mote, real or imagined. The vaguest suggestion that your loafers may have been sewn together by a child means that everything you believe is blown away by a this piece of ill-informed or ill-advised shopping. If you are on the right, you can behave however you want. You can film yourself fucking the last panda bear alive in the eye while screaming "Look at me! Look at me! I'm AA Gill! My cock destroys the endangered" and people will just nod and say, "well, he's on the right, he can do what he wants".

Vegetarians have the same problem. However coy they are about their avoidance of meat, the merest mumble that they'd rather not have that veal and lamb's ear pie thank you and they are accused of being smug and sanctimonious and rather like Hitler. Pol Pot and Stalin's enjoyment of lamb hotpot doesn't matter a jot to the omnivore.

You may increasingly think that this has nothing to do with why I said yes to writing for the Daily Telegraph and you are almost correct. In summary, I am not a fan of any mainstream daily newspaper and I am a Communist because my hackles rise when I see The Observer dedicating one third of its front page to "Susan Boyle – One Year On".

So when the Telegraph asked me to write a column, I saw no reason why not. I would not be releasing the hounds onto a shivering fox just by writing a few words for the

Telegraph and, much like being on Radio 4, it is the sort of thing your parents like.

The week of my first/last column a woman had put a cat in a bin. This had become the news of the week. Partly this was due to it happening in August, technically this is known as silly season. The idea being that all despots, maniacs, terrorists and extreme weather conditions take a break to respect British summertime before returning to their genocide and eruptions in early September. Silly Season is now sillier season, silly season occupying the rest of the year in print and on ITN. I am not pro cat persecution, but the story "woman puts cat in bin, cat lives" seemed a tad banal and there was a positive side. Though it was a negative experience for the mewling cat, it also led to many discussions of Schrodinger's cat – the fictional cat that was both dead and alive. What I thought would just be a

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**'Silly Season is now sillier season, silly season occupying the rest of the year in print and on ITN'**

---

nice few hundred words about how even the most dull and tawdry story can lead to musing over far more interesting scientific conundrums was perceived very differently by some regular comment makers and deluded pedants. Having had small to do with other telegraph bloggers in the past (a few months ago I wrote about my communications with James Delingpole and Damian Thompson), I thought a few people would read my piece wearing the rose tinted spectacles that would give my words the Trotskyite hue they wanted.

As usual, the bold cowards hid behind their silly cyber names. Noodledoorant started it off. I had begun the article by stating that Newton's Third Law of Motion was that for every action there was an equal and opposite reaction. Noodledoorant told me that wasn't Newton's Third Law of Motion



BOYLE

and I really should get things like that right. It really is his third law, unless Noodledoorant has some secret papers of Newton's he is refusing to share. Then it turned out I was being politically correct in using a cat rather than a baby, typical as I was, according to Openess, one of the liberal elite. Firstly, it was not my theoretical cat it was Schrodinger's, I don't even own a theoretical cat in my mind, I am not even more of a theoretical dog man, my mind cages no theoretical pets at all. Secondly, I'm not sure I am really a member of the liberal elite, don't I have to own a little power for that, or at least a car? I don't even have any silk pajamas. Despite clearly pointing out that the cat dropper was foolish, then the commenters bemoaned the rise of animal cruelty (in the pro-countryside pursuits Telegraph) before, very fortunately, someone misplaced an apostrophe and the rest of the comments were verbal fisticuffs over punctuation. I suggested to the zeditor that my next column could be about the horror of parting with books because you had run out of room in your house, a far more innocuous subject, but it seems they had decided to go with columnists on a rotation and may get in contact with me again. I think I might have fallen into the fire as the rotation of the Telegraph spit began.

And that was the end of my mainstream columnist career.

Lucky really.



THE OBSERVER



# "WILLIAM H MACY!"

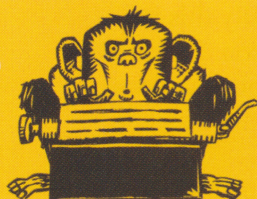
and other swearword substitutes

IN OUR FREE CUSS-REPLACEMENT  
GUIDE FOR NEW PARENTS



## daily mustard

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NORTHAMPTON EDITION



## Attempt to conserve the English coastline

Chicken-wire fence to be erected along seafront



Quincy Savage  
Dover

Standing at the water's edge on Dover beach, Edwin Hutch ceremoniously hammered in the first small wooden post in his hand-made chicken-wire fence.

Mr Hutch, 58, who is founder of the *Common Sense Committee to Conserve the Shape of England*, explained: "Every day there is another change forced upon this great nation of ours. Soon the Britain we recognise from our youth will be gone forever. Well, I for one have had enough, so I am making a stand. And a fence."

Mr Hutch has lived through a time

of tumultuous change, with supermarkets, immigration, test-tube babies, moon landings and political correctness all intruding onto his well-ordered existence. The final straw came when he heard that the coastline is receding at a rate of one millimetre per decade.

"This is unconscionable," railed Mr Hutch. "I firmly believe that the shape it was when I was born is correct, and must be protected."

"Spitfires didn't valiantly defend the skies above our heads just so

**'I firmly believe that the shape England was when I was born is correct.'**

some Brussels bureaucrat could erode the sand beneath our feet!"

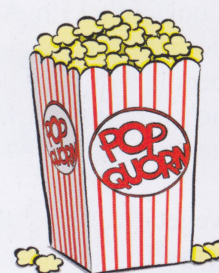
"You can call me old-fashioned," he pronounced. "But I believe in an England of short-back-and-sides, bicycle clips, *Terry and June* and Curly Wurlys."

"But if we don't act now, our grandchildren will grow up in a land mired in drugs and bad manners, and run by homeopaths and multiculturalists. That's if the internet hasn't turned them all into paedophiles!" he scoffed.

Head raised high, he turned to face Dover's iconic white cliffs. "Well, maybe I can't stop all that. But at least I'll go knowing England is still the *right bloody shape*." ■

### Pop Quorn

The cinema snack  
with no animal fat  
Food



### In the Soaps

A bit of a whale,  
some chemicals  
and a pubic hair  
Review



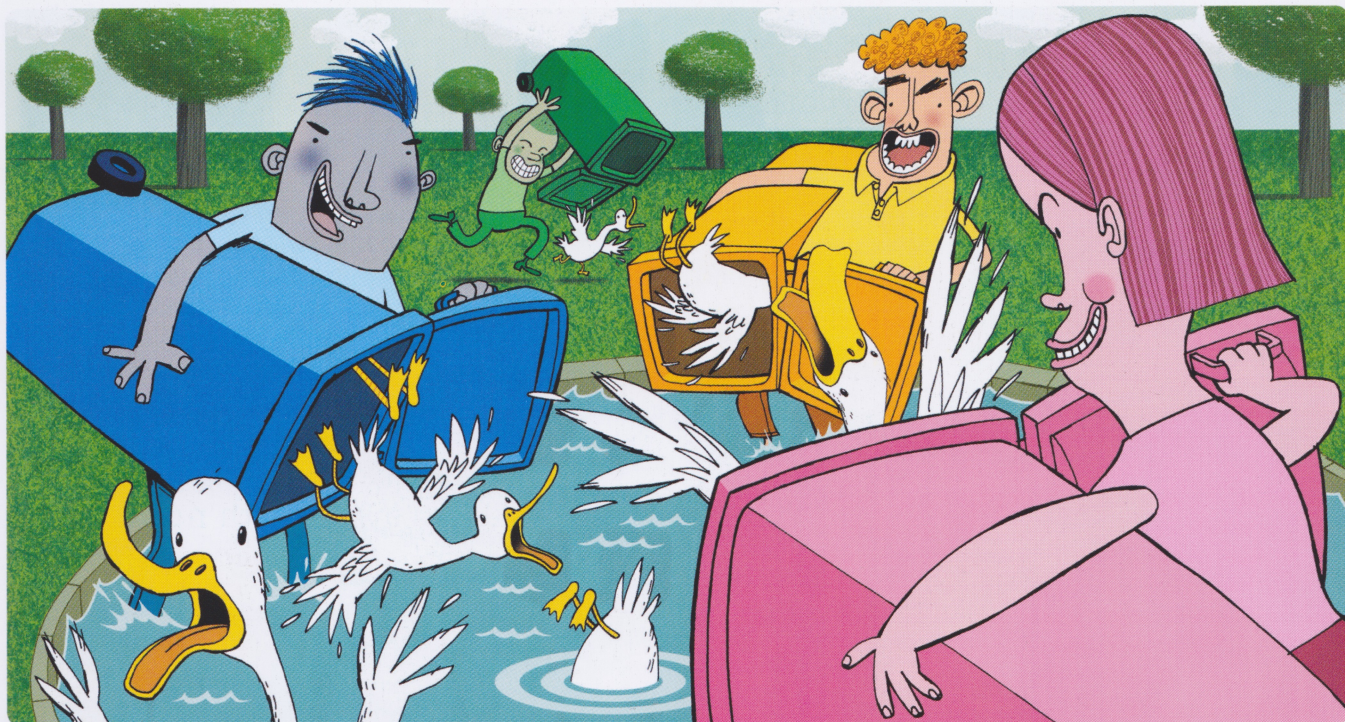
### Bible Belt

Easy hip-holster  
access to the Old  
& New Testaments  
Style





## Street Games



### Your guide to the new craze of live-action board games

#### Wheelie-Bin

##### Hungry, Hungry Hippos

Players stand around a duck pond with a side-turned wheelie-bin under one arm, holding the lid handle. When the ref bows his whistle they must capture as many ducks as they can in 60 seconds.

#### Squatter Monopoly

Players move from street to street, squatting in each of the Monopoly squares in turn. Anyone caught breaking and entering Goes Directly To Jail.

#### Mentalist Buckaroo

Players compete to balance hats, spectacles, street cones, beer cans, umbrellas, stray cats, etc. on a snoozing care-in-the-community recipient before he wakes up and tries to kill them.

#### Paving Stone Scrabble

Players prise up concrete pavement slabs and inscribe them with relevant letters and numbers. Giant Scrabble boards are chalked out on factory floors or painted onto football fields (see also: Roof-tile Mah Jong).

#### Discarded Needle Pick-up Sticks

Players compete to pick up as many discarded heroin needles as they can, without stabbing their fingers and getting infected with some horrible disease.

#### Multi-Storey Connect Four

Using the side-view of a multi-storey car park as the board, players take turns hot-wiring red or blue cars and moving them into position (see also: Fire Escape Snakes & Ladders).

#### Kama Sutra Twister

Popular at swingers' parties. The ref randomly selects a page from the Indian sex manual, and competing couples must shift positions without falling off the bed or out of each other.

#### Extreme Cluedo

Players commit actual crimes which are then investigated by the police, from aggravated assault with a pipe in the kitchen to first-degree murder with a lampshade in the drawing room.

ELIZABETH  
TAYLOR

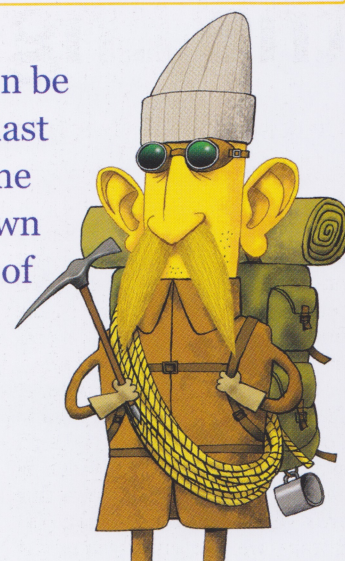
RICHARD  
BURTON

WHO'S AFRAID OF  
VIRGINIA TEENWOLF?

“ Adventuring can be dangerous. On my last trip to the North, one poor chap came down with a terrible case of Achilles Heel. ”

Continuing our exclusive excerpts from *Derring Dos & Don'ts*, the memoirs of Col D John Coleman

Weekend magazine



log us into your interpod:



myface



spacebook



fritter



**T**hermally triggered hydrogels are chemically trapping the protein

It might well  
be regarded  
as the most  
comprehensive  
survey of  
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## FROM

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Multisystems

1. The first step is to identify the problem.
 2. The second step is to define the problem.
 3. The third step is to analyze the problem.
 4. The fourth step is to develop a solution.
 5. The fifth step is to implement the solution.
 6. The sixth step is to evaluate the solution.
 7. The seventh step is to monitor the solution.
 8. The eighth step is to maintain the solution.
 9. The ninth step is to improve the solution.
 10. The tenth step is to document the solution.

1. *Chlorophyll*  
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# THE POSSIBILITY OF LIFE ON ANOTHER WORLD by Alan Moore

## On finding the asylum deserted:

**T**here is, of course, always the possibility that we're alone. If the first seeds of life arrived from somewhere else with comet-dust, as in Fred Hoyle's Panspermia hypothesis, then we should shortly find at least their remnants in the water-ice deposits that most probably exist upon Earth's moon or on the planet Mars. In absence of such a discovery we could only conclude that life developed locally, and lacking a full understanding of the processes by which inert and lifeless chemicals connected accidentally to form amino acids, RNA and DNA, we cannot possibly begin to calculate the odds of such a lucky chain of circumstances happening spontaneously elsewhere. While our universe is very large it is by no means infinite, and without knowing the exact means by which life originated or the probability of such a thing occurring there would seem a reasonable chance that there is not so much as the first scrap of moss abiding anywhere beyond the confines of this planet.

If that were to be the case, bearing in mind that as yet we possess no proof that it is not, then that would surely place our species under a compelling biological responsibility to be less lackadaisical regarding our continuing existence. After all, if we allow our world to be made uninhabitable, an unending toxic gas-storm in the mode of Venus, then it may be more than our own intermittently annoying species that we are consigning to oblivion. It may be that we leave our whole continuum an empty, echoing immensity that exists only for a dozen or so billion years between its pyrotechnic start and icy finish or incendiary collapse, completely unobserved and without meaning, as if it were never there at all. If we chose not to take that risk, this leaves us with the problem of realistically ensuring our continuation in light of the difficulties which we've manufactured for ourselves, many of which are consequences of our mindsets, of our madness, rather than of our admittedly precarious material environment. How do we need to think if we are to survive?

## PROGRESS REPORT (i)

*On finding the asylum deserted he retreated to a derelict ward's corner and commenced to rock repetitively back and forth, absorbing himself in the picture's details to avoid its whole. A grid of seams divided up the floor-tiles limned in powdered glass, two different strains of algae, and a sepia particulate of decomposed organic substances: food, excrement, dead skin, smashed insects. Overall the tiling had a greenish patina, the craquelure of tiny fissures in its glaze branching and multiplying toward deltas bordering on the infinitesimal. He'd made the right choice, opting for High Definition.*

*Had he, though? Focussed upon a glistening film of standing water, black specks darting purposefully on the meniscus, it occurred to him that all of his perceptions had been mediated for as long as he remembered by the various information services and entertainments which the destitute asylum had, he thought, provided at one point. As he recalled it, the experience had been that of having one's head enclosed within a buzzing cube of constant signal, of undifferentiated documentary warzone havoc and sitcom banality; a streamed reality in which the moans of the bereaved were intercut with jingles, random stimuli fragmenting his emotional responses until he'd had no idea what he should care about. He saw now that he had allowed his choice of newspaper, his favourite shows and his most-purchased products to become extensions of his personality. He had unknowingly invested so much into this commercial construct, this expanded new identity, that he'd become his own consumer profile. The opinions and the preferences he had come to think of as his self were nothing more, he realised, than an aggregate of prompts. His sexuality had, for the greater part, amounted to no more than lonely congress with oblivious cathode ghosts and meanwhile, at the centre of this network of transactions, there was no-one there.*

*Lifting his burdened head he gazed uncomprehendingly at the ward's dangling and dislocated door, a column of anaemic daylight falling on the corridor beyond in a milk of magnesia suspension. Where were all the other patients? Where had the administrators gone? Suppressing his considerable panic he supposed that he was free to leave, to venture forth for the first time outside the institution. Was there an outside? He'd been born here in the asylum, like his parents and his grandparents before him, and had never entertained the notion previously. He distantly remembered seaside holidays during his childhood that had been conducted without ever leaving the asylum grounds, and both his father and grandfather had assured him that there had been many great wars fought entirely on the premises. But what now, now the madhouse had apparently been shut down, suddenly and without notice, without explanation? Was all of that history to be left unfinished, as frustrating and as fruitless as a book abandoned by its author? Possibly the funding had dried up, or a dispute between administrative factions had resulted in immediate closure, something like that. All he knew for certain was that he'd been left amid the rubble of his prison, his amusement park, his bedlam and his world. He was alone in the appalling silence.*

*After a few hours he rose unsteadily to make his way towards the broken door and partially illuminated corridor beyond, the debris of spilled tranquilisers crushed to powder under his bare feet.*

## Beyond the disappearing limits of the floor-plan:

What we call 'The World', as differentiated from the geological and cosmic entity we call 'The Planet', is a thing constructed solely from our immaterial ideas: our ideologies and economic theories, our fantastical religious aspirations and our arbitrary desires. The mostly artificial landscapes which surrounds us, with the clothing that we wear, the buildings within which we live and the newspaper-headline concepts that drift through our thoughts, are all a product of human imagination. In effect, we have unpacked our heads and turned the contents into playhouse furnishings which we now act out our allotted roles amongst and think of as reality, having forgotten we were only playing and that this all started as a game of 'let's pretend' until the biggest boy said 'I'll be King, and you can be my servants.'

Although the elaborate pretence we call society (as famously denounced by Margaret Thatcher) has known periods where it appeared to hold considerable benefits, at least for some of us, it seems as if the game we improvised initially is no longer sustainable or safe. While the enthusiasm of our Neolithic forebears and their 'we could do the show right here' approach to culture is to be applauded, it may be that in these very different times the first-draft rules of the civilisation game are no longer appropriate for dealing with our current plight. A round of blind man's buff may be a harmless and enjoyable pursuit if it's conducted in an open meadow, whereas on a narrow mountain path it's a much less inviting proposition.

Clearly, our constructed world, our multi-player shoot-'em-up adventure, has grown to a scale and level of complexity where mere amendments to its constantly-expanding rulebook are unlikely to affect the situation. If we are to do things differently, then perhaps what is called for is a careful and intelligent dismantling of the complicated game that we are currently engaged in. Simply to depose its organisers in a violent revolution and put new ones in their place would seem, historically, unlikely to succeed in that we usually end up playing some minor variation on our previous pastime, but on a Monopoly board that has become more bloodstained and increasingly illegible. Hierarchical societies have structures that are best expressed as pyramids in terms of their design, and in dismantling a pyramid there's little point in knocking off the capstone when that is the single feature of the edifice that it is easiest to replace. Much better to commence the deconstruction from the bottom up, removing the conceptual foundation stones upon which the entire arrangement stands.

Foremost amongst these fundamental building-blocks is the conditioning that has allowed us to subsume our precious individual identities within much bigger and more abstract constructs such as race or creed or nationality. Left to our own devices, and in simpler times, it would be natural to see ourselves only in terms of the immediate community that we were physically and emotionally a part of, a random conglomerate of family and friends with whom we were connected and where the idea of someone being leader would seldom if ever raise its head. Authority, however, needs to carefully define its limits, which will generally involve as large an area as is practical. Thus there arises the conception of the nation state, or, for our more ambitious tribal demagogues, the empire. People must be sold a grand and literally mythological idea of king and country if they're to be called upon to give their earnings and perhaps their lives in the defence or maintenance of these largely imaginary institutions. Once the idea of the nation is in place, however, it is very difficult to budge or topple.

This is not to say that it can't be outgrown or that it is an obstacle around which we cannot manoeuvre. National boundaries are decided by a combination of geography and tactical considerations, but it could be argued that our burgeoning advances in communication culminating in the advent of the internet have made such details as the country we are physically located in increasingly irrelevant. Our pre-existing territorial maps become redundant and evaporate. The social networks that we form today and in the future are less likely to be predicated on our geographic whereabouts, allowing new cooperative affiliations to emerge and making possible a world in which small human-sized communities have an autonomous existence in a non-competitive and borderless global arrangement; where the places that we live have opportunities to flourish as part of a co-dependent larger whole without the need for alienating and divisive concepts such as nationality.



Of course, the modern nation is defined by more than its geography, and must be understood to be an economic entity as well. In fact, this aspect is more central to a nation state's identity than its size or whereabouts upon the planet. As some economic commentators have already pointed out, contemporary leaders serve no obviously useful function that could not be handled by a competent administrator, the sole reason that they are our leaders being that they are the people who control the currency. However, as with most of our important social mechanisms, currency is at its root the most transparent 'let's pretend' of all. The days are long gone when a nation could realistically pledge to redeem a banknote for either a fraction of our vanished gold reserve or goods of equal value, meaning that money is in the present day essentially a stream of immaterial and abstract numbers passing between bank exchanges and has no direct relation to any commodity that actually materially exists. All our economies are based, like voodoo, on the faith and almost mystical belief of the participants. If nobody believes in your blood-curdling curses or your scraps of printed paper, then you have no power in either instance. Currencies, including in that term Monopoly money and the Linden dollars used in Second Life, only have any value if you're in the game.

While previous attempts to instigate alternative varieties of currency have met with the Draconian response one might expect with something so essential to authority's survival, as with the above example of the nation state's declining geographic relevance it may be that the internet drastically alters the potential of the playing field. New currencies are easier to put in place, like the 'Green Pound' barter economies currently operating in some of our hardest-hit communities, while at the same time such arrangements become harder to police. Even within conventional society we see attempts to find alternatives to cash, with everyday phenomena like supermarket loyalty schemes being effectively new forms of currency. Some modern firms pay their employees in 'company credits' with which they can purchase anything from groceries to a house, thus bypassing the need for money altogether. With conventional economies collapsing and the overall financial system regularly going into spasm, new approaches such as these become both more attractive and more necessary.

The removal (or the obsolescence) of the nation state as both an economic and a socio-political construction would still leave our sense of national identity intact. England would still be England, Wales would still be Wales and Pakistan would still be Pakistan. We could still celebrate the places that we live in, with their streets, fields, histories and fascinating people, without needing to confuse the things we genuinely love about our countries with such ultimately meaningless and artificial pissing-contests as our country's status on the planet's stock-markets and battlefields or, for that matter, in its ruinously costly sporting stadiums. With these two lynchpins of the nation state out of the picture, namely its political and economic functions, we would still admittedly be left with huge organisational dilemmas when it came to putting something better in its stead. However, we would have a very different vantage point from which we could consider such eventualities. If these two bulwarks of authority were not in place, our psychological terrain would be transmogrified.

Our private landscapes would become unrecognisable.

## PROGRESS REPORT (ii)

*Beyond the disappearing limits of the floor-plan, where the levelled stubs of brick in orange seams between the nettles marked the vanished walls, the overnight abandonment of the asylum was apparent from horizon to horizon. Quilted fields had been unpicked, their ragged yellow flags of rape surrendered to undifferentiated wilderness amid which the remains of distant sink-estates rose from the undergrowth at intervals, as alien and enigmatic as forgotten Aztec temples. In the closed box of his numb awareness, what coherent thoughts he had were lost in tidal swells of after-closedown static, white noise residues of Big Bang radiation or the gripes of*

*unintelligible ghosts. Before him as he stumbled barefoot without destination or agenda, a pale rectangle of fugitive and bluish light advanced across the unkempt grass or marigold-split tarmac of the desolated institution's hushed and empty motorways. Square-headed he stood marvelling for several minutes at a stranded pink hen-party limousine, its rear seats re-upholstered by wine-coloured moss, deserted save for the suspended shimmer of unnervingly large dragonflies. Some distance further on he found an ornamental lake that had a central island made from hundreds of fused shopping trolleys, colonised by nesting swans.*

*Whatever meaning might have once resided in the disused flyovers and echoing roadside refreshment areas had long since departed, the confectionary section in the latter now a hive of earwigs. This new territory could not be read, rendered more indecipherable than the signposts edited by rust or the identities of vacant warehouses, their gap-toothed brand insignia reduced to uncompleted crossword blanks by a collapse of giant calligraphy. How could the admonition to SLOW DOWN be understood in context of a world almost entirely without motion? What was the current significance of the untidy, narrow corridor of orchard that had previously been a central reservation? In evacuated suburbs, now completely-detached houses gazed with stupid, smashed eyes and a slack-jawed look about their porches at corroded district street maps that insisted YOU ARE HE. Unsure of even that he limped past dry-gulched petrol stations, carcass multiplexes and reforested carpet emporiums; picked his way amongst orphaned speed-cameras and across amnesiac leisure centres where only encroaching bindweed, lazy and unhurried, retained the most fragile water-memory of leisure. Finally, the gradually increasing density of plasterboarded and buddleia-gushing former businesses along the wayside's mix of inadvertent lawn with ruptured paving slab convinced him that he was approaching what must once have been a major conurbation.*



Over the shrub-punctured chimneys and subsiding roofs a leaden canopy of cumulus appeared to have become unfastened from its moorings at one corner of the skyline, with the forms and colours of an unfamiliar firmament beyond revealed in flapping glimpses. He could not decide if this was an environmental breakdown or a lapse in cinematic continuity, some painted background flat in need of a replacement. Shambling through precincts filled with unappreciated luxury he wondered if the whole asylum with its centuries of back-story had been a fiction all along, a movie franchise that was now exhausted with its last original idea five or six sequels back, its props and sets left to disintegrate, its cast and crew presumably moved on to new productions. Or perhaps the madhouse was no more than a characteristically over-dramatic and suspiciously well-detailed paranoid delusion dreamed up by the inmates and directors, or at least by people who believed that they were inmates and directors. He supposed that in the last analysis it didn't matter. His existence and that of the streets he lived in had been only narrative, a narrative that now would never be resolved but left instead to merely peter out, even its characters too tired and uninspired to think of a next chapter. History and society were strands in an unfinished script, apparently discarded, and the authorship of the initial pitch no longer seemed important.

Bumbling white swarms of plastic bags crackled and snapped around the overflowing litter-bins of the development's commercial centre, rubbish pollinating rubbish. Vacant bus-shelters were wallpapered by the scrawled names of since-departed teenage occupants, saucy endorsements, pornographic accusations, with the gradually eroding metal shells become an unofficial sex-offenders register, now surplus to requirements. He negotiated terraces where not a decomposed net curtain twitched and trod the chilly cobbles of rear-entries that were ringing with an absence of dead car alarms. Sometimes his poorly-functioning vertical hold was acting up so that the urban scenery before his eyes scrolled nauseatingly, but lacking any other viable alternative he carried on through silent courts and passages that were not even haunted, making his haphazard way more deeply still into that great forgetting.

Slowly he became convinced that he had seen the wind-raked streets he hobbled down before, back when they were inhabited and the distinction between satellite dish and convenient birdbath was still possible to make. Had he perhaps grown up in this stretch of the institution grounds, even been born here, or was that some kind of desperate compensatory illusion, like the dreams that you think you remember in another dream, then have no way of telling if you really had them or if they were only dreams of dreams, hallucinations of mirages?











*As he followed dredged-up instincts that he half-suspected were imaginary, his initially tenuous conviction grew. Surely he knew this corner; recognised the bright penny-sweet wrappers in amongst the saccharine rubble spilling though the missing door of its almost demolished shop? Quickening his pace despite the blisters that had formed and burst and formed again upon his ruined feet he hurried down almost-remembered avenues, past rotted house-fronts where the garden had at some point realised that there would be no objection if it moved indoors. After a time he reached what he believed might once have been his school in a lost era when there was still information, now devoured by its own playing field. He frowned at coloured chalk lines on a still-enduring raft of concrete in the brimming lake of greenery, and tried to bring to mind what hopscotch was. There was a quality to the once-fit gymnasium gone to seed or fungus-patch of sprouting porcelain marking a fallen toilet-block that he could not at first identify, then realised with a start that it was meaning, that these powder-paintbombed art-rooms and discarded coat-hooks actually meant something to him, even if he no longer possessed the language to elucidate upon what that might be.*

*Limping and terribly uncertain, following this new spoor of significance he ventured onward, up a gentle gradient now carpeted with ferns that he recalled as having formerly been the approach- road to his childhood promenades, the nest of ravelling lanes and mystifying business premises that he had, just conceivably, been raised amongst. His breathing hoarse and ragged, deafening in the close acoustic confines of his headset, he eventually broached the hill's crest to discover there was almost nothing left. The labyrinth of old red brick enclosures that he found he could still nearly picture, recollections like an underexposed photograph, had all been cleared away or else had lost their war with the rampaging turf. Only a single building still remained, ignored even by the annihilating vegetation. It looked singularly different, taken from the context of the other houses that had once surrounded it, but while he could not be completely sure he felt there was at least a chance that it was where he'd lived, where things at one time had at least seemed to make sense.*

*He stood there staring at the isolated edifice and wondered where the neighbouring homes had gone, cancelled domestic sagas that had been unwritten. Seen in bare seclusion the dilapidated residence to him looked more than ever like a head, a weathered skull worn down to the hard bone of brickwork; possibly his own. If that were true, if the neglected tenement was his own self-contained, freestanding, lonely cranium, would all his infant plans and thoughts and speculations still be found within, solidified to sodden mattresses or cast-off washing-up bowls made receptacles for tramp shit?*

*And, if that were true, how would he ever summon up the nerve to go inside?*

## **The reassurance of familiar structures:**

In the absence of the nation state's restraints, be they political or fiscal, it may be supposed that our projected network of electronically connected and loosely affiliated small communities, having arrived at an agreeable form of exchange between their independent local currencies, would still need to establish structures of administration and have a capacity for managing some kind of functioning society, with all the handling of education, health and other areas of decision-making such an enterprise would necessarily entail.

A governmental system that might prove effective on a local, countrywide or even international level is the government by lottery approach favoured in ancient Athens, previously discussed within these pages. Under this arrangement, if issues arise requiring a community decision then a jury is appointed, randomly and from all quarters of society, by means of a lottery. This jury will hear an informed debate upon the subject, putting both sides of the argument, and then arrive at their decision, after which the jury is dissolved. By having no fixed government, the possibility of jurors introducing legislation in the own self-interest is eliminated, while the likelihood of voting in the interest of a general public to whom they will shortly be returning is tremendously increased.

In terms of manufacturing a stable and coherent social system, it should be remembered that prevention beats cure, and that the majority of social problems have their origins in need and deprivation. One of the more radical suggestions as to how such problems might be dealt with at their source is that all members of the population should receive a realistic living income from the state or its equivalent, regardless of employment status. Thus a jobless person who'd found work would not be made to give up their existing benefits, removing the well-known poverty trap in which getting a job may often mean that vital income is in fact reduced beyond bearable limits. In improved financial circumstances where these basic benefits were no longer required, it would be possible to trade them in against reductions in such things as income tax.

This set-up would of course demand a staggering amount of money being made available, although this would be at least partly recompensed by savings made in areas like health and crime reduction, given that these issues are both poverty-related. Also, while our dissolution of the nation state might ultimately lead to greater international stability and a proportionate reduction in our spending on defence, a massive short-term saving could be made by the abandoning of nuclear missile systems such as Trident; systems that cost billions but will never be employed unless a vast majority of us are dead already or are going to be dead by the next day. Which, after all, is more important – the wellbeing of real people who are currently alive, or the effectiveness of our kill-ratios in some imaginary future war that, even in its advocates own estimation, would be pretty much the end of everything? Seen in this light, the financing of universal benefits can hardly seem impractical.

Such an attempt to erase poverty, were it in any way successful, would presumably see a reduction in the instances of poverty-related crime, but it would be naive to think that lack of need would alter certain types of criminality. There are some people, after all, who are convinced that it's in their best interest to cheat, steal and extort and any benefits which they received would be unlikely to dissuade them from their practices. Therefore, some system would be necessary to persuade such people towards more responsible behaviour, hopefully without resorting to the same brutal, dehumanising and almost entirely ineffectual methods employed by present-day authoritarian societies. Prison, for instance, with the nation's jails at full capacity and verging on collapse, quite clearly isn't working in its function as deterrent and instead would seem to be an institution in which any anti-social grievances are likely to become both aggravated and ingrained, while also functioning as an academy where first-time criminals pick up career advice from more experienced colleagues.

Similarly, in a world of basic living standard benefits available to all, it would make little sense to stop or to reduce these benefits for those guilty of theft or petty crime, thus recreating the exact conditions that make larceny such an inviting option in the first place. It might make more sense, rather than limiting offenders' income, to restrict those things that they can spend it on. A term of months or years during which the offender was allowed to purchase shelter, clothing, food and other such essentials and yet was prohibited from spending anything on pubs, clubs, football games or other forms of social entertainment would perhaps encourage even a persistent criminal towards the view that life was more enjoyable and profitable without stealing.

Measures such as the above clearly are not intended to address the issue of those with more pathological varieties of criminal behaviour such as the incorrigibly violent or the sexually abusive: rapists, murderers, maniacs and brutes. In dealing with such volatile and aberrant individuals, unless as a culture we are motivated only by revenge, perhaps it would be more effective to perceive these widely flagged-up social menaces as simply being seriously ill, or possibly emotionally handicapped? If this were so, where certain cases would require confinement just as if they had a dangerous disease, then well-trained and secure facilities equivalent to psychiatric hospitals would surely offer a preferable alternative to prison, with the length of someone's stay depending, as in hospital, on whether it could be determined if they'd been made well or not, rather than on some ultimately arbitrary prison sentence. Under such a system, an apparently incurable offender such as Ian Brady would in every likelihood still be confined, while someone like Raoul Moats might have received the treatment that could have prevented his initial shooting rampage and subsequent suicide. This reclassification would perhaps also have the effect of robbing violence of its often-fatal glamour, with our breathless fascination for the cold-eyed, ruthless gangster or the brilliant wine-appreciating psychopath replaced by a perception of an individual who is no more than emotionally subnormal.



Just as the removal of impoverishment might be expected to result in a decrease of poverty-related crime, it is conceivable that our remodelling of society might ultimately see reductions in even these far more serious offences. It's worth pointing out that serial murder is agreed by most authorities upon the subject to be a phenomenon solely occasioned by industrial or post-industrial societies, and it would therefore seem at least plausible that its incidence could be greatly alleviated by a fundamental shift in social structure of the kind that we're proposing.

Education is of course the lynchpin underlying any culture, real or hypothetical, and a re-thought approach to learning would be necessary if the blue-sky vision of society above were ever to become a workable, sustainable reality. While healthcare should be made more universally accessible, the basic principle of social medicine remains both sound and visibly effective...as with Cuba, where the free health service is demonstrably among the planet's most efficient and reliable...and is in no need of immediate overhaul. With education, though, it could be argued that for too long our school system has caused many of those passing through it to associate learning with work and work, inevitably, with monotony. This helps create a population that have been pre-programmed to endure long periods at jobs which they do not find interesting and in their free time to avoid activities (like reading books) which smack of learning, work and therefore boredom, opting instead for an evening on the sofa watching undemanding rubbish that will teach them nothing and so is not work but must, in their conditioned terms, be seen as pleasure. Acting more like some kind of aversion therapy meant to encourage a revulsion for the whole idea of education, our longstanding current system could be seen as having alienated many people from the processes of learning that might otherwise have helped empower them by derailing and subverting children's natural tendency to want to find out about absolutely everything.

Perhaps if we agree with Henry Thoreau that it seems cruel and unnatural to coop up children during the one period of their lives when they might reasonably expect to be allowed to play, itself a highly educational activity, then we could offer a solution that involved less formal hours of teaching, but provided education that was more enjoyable, more relevant and more importantly more able to communicate both the sheer pleasure and the much more satisfying life that come with learning. If a fundamental love of language and of reading can be instilled early on (thus granting the child access to at least a basic grasp of numeracy, history, geography, the arts and sciences) then most experts agree that higher levels of intelligence are more or less assured. Once these essentials were in place, the child's remaining time could be spent in constructive play, or else in the proximity of adults as they went about their daily tasks which, after all, was how most people's education came about in pre-industrial times. This last approach to educating children, by encouraging them to spend time with parents finding out first-hand how the grown-up world works, would perhaps be an easier proposition in the electronically-connected village system that's envisioned here or similar proposal by the futurologists Alvin and Heidi Toffler in the former's splendid and incisive book *The Third Wave*.

Once a child had been allowed to thus enjoy a relatively unrestricted childhood, and might even have begun to form an idea of the area that he or she was more than usually interested in, then some more specialised and formal education could begin. This should again be managed as enjoyably as possible, and should again be measured by its relevance to the child's actual life. A mandatory class on the curriculum that dealt with basic life skills such as how to build relationships, to get on with a partner, to avoid debt or successfully bring up an unplanned baby would at least provide a start.

While the above can be no more than tentative suggestions, the loosest sketch of a more beneficial and improved society, this last observation with regard to education is perhaps a crucial one. If we're to formulate the new cultural mindset necessary for our species to continue, then it's vital that we raise our children as the healthy individuals who can continue with and build from the arrangement they've inherited. The younger generation are always the bricks and mortar that the future is constructed from, although they're often stuck with the impractical and confused diagrams their elders leave behind. If the intensely personal and vivid landscape of our childhoods were a better place, perhaps we would grow into better people, in a better world?

## PROGRESS REPORT (iii)

*The reassurance of familiar structures settled over him like plaster-dust the moment that he swung his callused feet across the threshold of the semi-derelict and lonely residence. This was his old house, he was sure of it. These were the creaking stairs and looming banisters that he'd grown up amongst, the last place that he could remember living where his personality was definitely that of who he really was; was his original unmodified identity before the doubts and the anxieties of adolescence caused him to discard that childhood self in favour of a hastily-constructed new persona nailed together from the borrowed mannerisms of people that he admired, of television personalities and the bronzed, rugged men in cigarette advertisements.*

*The scent of damp and of a former habitation lingered in the peeling hall. Within the disembowelled front room he gazed through a cracked window at the overgrown and meaningless expanse outside, beyond the dirty glass. Being inside the house, as he'd anticipated, was like being inside his own head. There was the same sense of detachment from the baffling world without, the same sense of frustratingly curtailed perspective. But then looking outward over ground that he'd already trodden was perhaps not the most practical approach to his predicament. Perhaps he should be looking further in.*

*A fine soot of dead insects had formed drifts on the interior windowsill of the silently decomposing living room. Above a dust-cauled mantelpiece he noticed his absurd reflection in the eye of a long-unattended looking glass. It struck him with the logic of a half-remembered children's story that if he sought meaning and a solid bedrock for his atrophied identity, then going 'further in' would entail finding a way into his own fractured and fragmented mind. He'd have to climb inside himself.*

*He clambered awkwardly onto the mantelpiece and leaned experimentally towards his mirror-self. In the reflection of the screen that was his face he saw himself reflected, endlessly.*

## Significance like lamplight:

If we are to realise a new reordered world by the above means...or by any other perhaps more plausible means we might devise...then it is evident that in whatever form they come, such measures must be radical and will demand a fundamentally new mindset. A paradigm-shift is required, an alteration of the basic concepts upon which our world is founded, as occurred with the Renaissance and the Age of Reason it made possible. Though rationality, inarguably, has lifted us into a better world and has done much to render our human condition bearable we must remember that it is only a system, albeit an astounding and endlessly useful system, and that every system has its limits. There are those who would suggest that in pursuing rationality so single-mindedly we have made modern life in many ways emotionally more barren and unsatisfying. Having necessarily cast doubt upon the naive certainties of faith that had sustained our forebears, rationality has only offered lives of toil in order to afford the fruits of science that our science-driven culture makes essential, followed by death and oblivion in a universe which science assures us has resulted from blind accident and has no quintessential underlying meaning. In such a random cosmos, how are we to reach a worldview that even gives us a point to our existence, let alone a sense of harmony or purpose?

Might it not at least be useful, as starting point, to draw a demarcation between physical, material reality and the separate but no less genuine reality that is within our minds? If these two worlds were seen as sovereign territories, a two-state solution if you will, then it might be possible for them to co-exist with science having no authority to say that the components of our inner world have no existence or importance, and religion having no authority to contradict the solid findings of scientists and palaeontologists simply because these do not agree with ancient tales best understood as meaningful allegories. With this territorial dispute thus settled, we could then furnish our inner landscapes as ascetically or richly as we wanted. We might even find that types of thinking we discarded with the onset of strict rationality are still applicable, and possibly even compatible with reason now that reason isn't actively attempting to eradicate them and vice-versa.

After all, in the material world a thing is what it is. A rock's a rock. A tree's a tree. In the internal, immaterial world, upon the other hand, the meaning that we chose to give a thing is up to us. In the rich worldview of Renaissance alchemists and scholars, much was made of the conceptual correspondences connecting all the ideas in the universe into a hopefully harmonious whole. Systems like the kabbalah form associations between numbers, colours, letters, planets, metals, animals, gems, ancient gods and philosophical ideas. In practice, this means that a rock is still a rock and yet, depending on what kind of rock it is, connects us to a web of interconnected concepts that we may find helpful in developing the more expanded consciousness that sparks new possibilities. The better world we seek is ultimately to be found inside us, in our new ideas and our rapidly altering awareness.

## PROGRESS REPORT (iv)

*Significance like lamplight drenched the room beyond the glass, where even the most mundane object coruscated with its own indwelling genius and every glimpse held meaning like a chalice. In his head, the incessant reception buzz had stopped and he could hear the language of the birds outside as he climbed down from off the mantel into an environment which, for the first time that he could remember, felt like home. Around him were the burnished artefacts and icons representing fifty centuries of consciousness and human continuity. The floor beneath his naked feet was all the Earth, and in the constellation-decorated ceiling overhead was symbolised unending firmament. The winds and the directions were his walls and he stood at the centre of his own domestic cosmos.*

*Looking back into the mirror at the broken realm that he had only recently emerged out of he understood those barren, alienated climes to have been only a reflection of this real world all along, the insubstantial march of threatening shadows on the wall of Plato's cave. How had he managed to survive emotionally in such a place, where he had always felt himself to be a little mad and very much alone? Where any contact with another inmate was subverted by the fact that they were almost certain to be as delusional as him, if not considerably more so?*

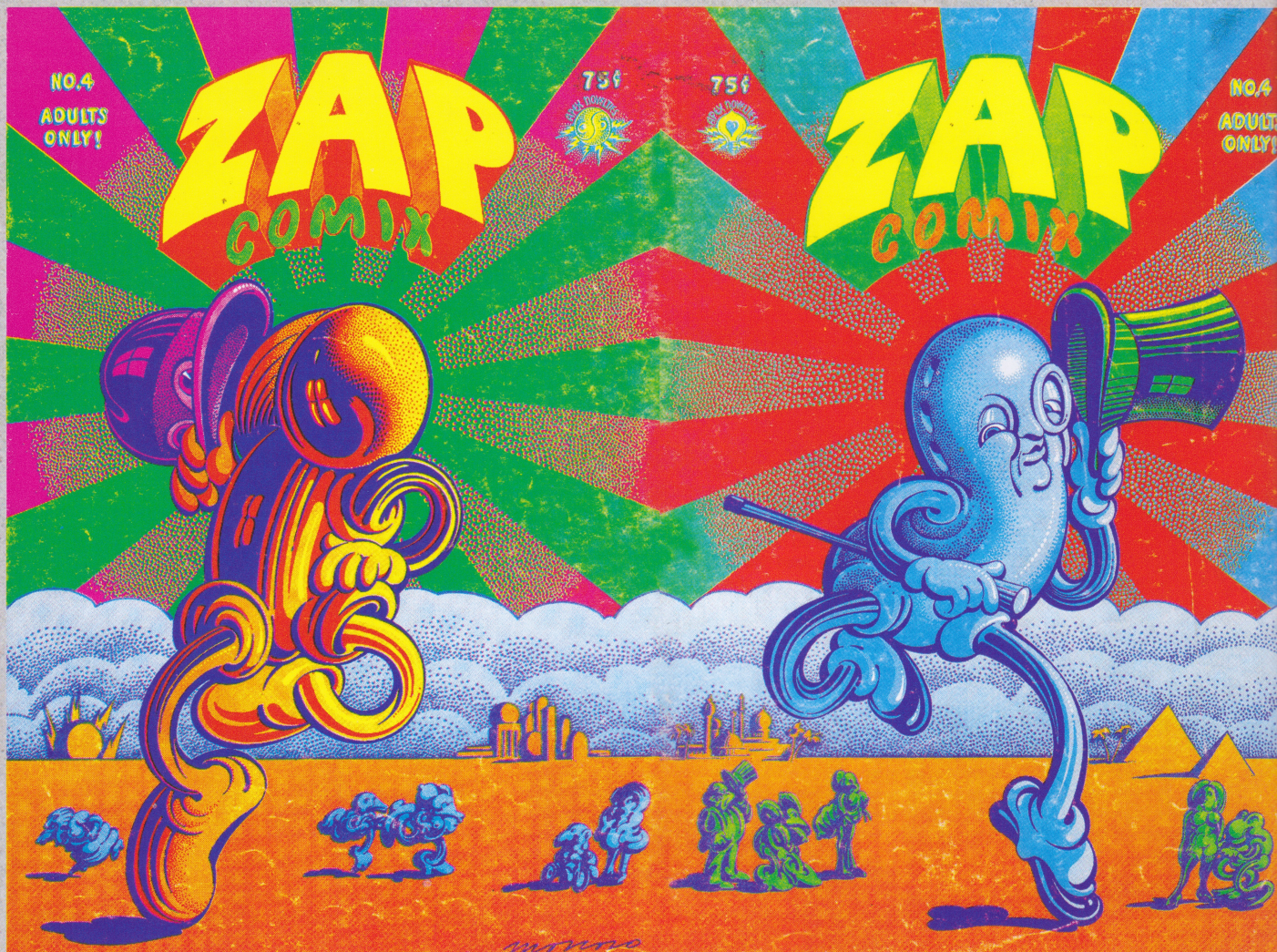
*Out beyond the shining chamber and its various adjoining halls he heard the conversation of untroubled women and the squeals of distant children.*

*Taking a deep breath and almost trembling with anticipation, he removed his head.*









# WEIRDOES

Dick Foreman gawps & cringes his way through a mouldering pile of 60s & 70s 'underground' comics

## 1: Up From the Deep

**A** psychotic superhero wart-hog with a penchant for ripping human heads from off their spinal columns.

A bald and bearded guru, with a taste for the pleasures of the flesh and a perverse desire to wind up his most devoted disciple.

A foul-mouthed, cigar chewing dyke biker, machine gunning low-life males to shreds as she and her gang ride by on their Harleys.

A blissed out pinhead in a polka dot gown, connoisseur of junk foods and spin cycles, a spouter of non-sequiturs.

These are but four of the characters who turned up with some regularity when 'underground comics' were at their peak in the late 60s and early 70s. Such comics were a phenomenon of US and UK culture exclusively. Which is not to say that comics containing bizarre characters and 'adult' subject matter did not exist elsewhere in the world. Simply that, in the US and UK, comics had largely been considered kids' stuff only. It took the advent of 60s underground culture to bring them to the attention of more than a small minority of adults. Elsewhere in the world, they were already an accepted art form for grown-ups.

Underground comics at their best were inventive, dazzlingly graphic, perceptive, thought provoking, incredibly funny, individualistic, challenging, committed, and utterly liberated.

Underground comics at their worst were appallingly drawn, derivative, sexist (even misogynistic), self-indulgent, incomprehensible, fuzzily idealistic and morally murky.

A curious thing about them was that these aspects – the best, the worst – would often be manifest in the work of one creator, sometimes even the in the same comic strip.

Despite their failings, however, they were to have a powerful influence on the subsequent development of the comics field. Here in the early 21st century, no major book retailer fails to include a range of so-called 'graphic novels' in their listings. Whilst the term is no guarantee of quality, and many of them turn out to be compilations of episodic stories originally published in monthly comic formats, you will find amongst them examples of great writing, great art, sophisticated subject matter and emotionally involving content. Our approach to comics has moved at least a little closer into line with that of France or Spain or Japan. The role of the undergrounds in this development was critical.

So what were they? How did they originate? What shaped the trajectory that led them to thrive for a decade or so and then gradually fade? What kind of people created them? What follows is a brief survey, a mention of some of the major names in the field, their works and what became of them. It's an attempt to examine that which they achieved, its impact and critical reception and then how it all knitted in to the history of comics in the late 20th Century.

Above all, it's an opportunity for me to ramble on for a few thousand words about one of my favourite subjects.



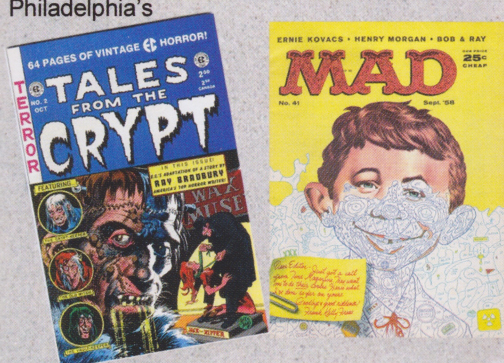
## 2: Bogey Men

In the 50s and early 60s there were precedents. Sleaze in the crudely pornographic 'Tijuana Bibles'; horror, science fiction and social commentary in 'EC' Comics; satire and relatively sophisticated humour in magazines like 'Mad' and, later, 'Help'. Many of the creators involved in these publications were revered by the young underground artists, as too were those behind celebrated newspaper strips from earlier in the 20th Century such as Winsor McCay's 'Little Nemo', George Herriman's 'Krazy Kat', Al Capp's 'Li'l Abner' and Will Eisner's 'The Spirit'.

But by the mid 60s American comics were largely moribund. EC Comics in particular had provoked a backlash from the 'moral majority', symptomatic of the period's hounding of left-wing sympathisers. With their demise came the 'Comics Code Authority' which permitted distribution only for the blandest and most inoffensive of comic strips.

Nevertheless, Stan Lee's Marvel Comics brand was gathering steam, with its iconoclastic artists and innovative approach to the characterisation of super heroes. The Marvel imprint managed to remain pretty hip throughout the period in which the undergrounds flourished, but there was little in the way of cross-pollination. Other than for satirical purposes, nascent hippy artists had little time for super heroes.

Their early work began to appear through various outlets. College campus magazines and fanzines provided one route; another was hot-rod and surfboard art with its associated publications. Yet more of the creators became known through their work producing psychedelic posters. And many became contributors to the emerging underground papers such as the San Francisco Bay area's *Oracle* and Berkely *Barb*, Philadelphia's



Yarrowstalks and New York's *East Village Other*. Some of the earliest underground comics as such were compilations of strips thus published.

It was the first issue of Robert Crumb's self-published *Zap*, in 1967, which kick-started the boom. Crumb had recently moved to San Francisco and became firmly associated with the developing counter culture scene there – although he soon became uncomfortable with his self-labelled 'happy hippy' tag (doubtless realising that the irony with which he had assumed the description was lost on the majority of his readers). He sought to distance himself, cultivating a conservative, bespectacled and suited image, yet his frequently imitated drawing style remains synonymous with the underground comics.

Crumb's strips of the late 60s and early 70s seem to contain the neat essence of every animated cartoon or charming comic strip you read in your childhood, thus making the frequently extreme and sexual content of his work all the more subversive. Controversy remains to this day regarding the attitudes he expresses concerning women. Yet even his sternest critics acknowledge the honesty with which he exposes his own depths, the subtlety with which he plays with stereotypes or the compassion and concern he sometimes reveals.

For this writer, Crumb frequently explores concepts and ideas going way beyond his underground contemporaries – and can be at his most resonant with an apparent simplicity. In a 1 page, nearly wordless strip – 'Mr Natural Does the Dishes' –

we see Crumb's bearded guru character grumpily approaching an unruly pile of dirty dishes. He begins, unwillingly, to wash them. A panel or two on, he commences to apply himself to the job, getting involved in it. Towards the end, he's whistling cheerfully. Then he's holding up a freshly washed glass, admiring its gleam. In the final panel he's contentedly walking away from an immaculate pile of clean, draining crockery, saying to no one in particular: "Another job well done." And that's it. Elegantly Crumb has traced the pattern of our human relationship with work, and illustrated how genuine satisfaction can be found in even the most mundane of tasks, depending on our attitude to the job at hand.

Think what you will of his taboo busting 'The Family that Lays Together Stays Together' and its like, this short strip equally illustrates the breadth of freedom that Crumb found in the underground comic. The freedom to draw 8 panels of a guy doing the washing up... and make it profound.

For *Zap* #2, Crumb opened the comic to a small group of fellow underground artists. Together, they went on to produce more issues irregularly over a span of years, the last appearing in 2004, long after almost every other underground comic had become a fading memory or a yellowing collectors' item.

The *Zap* crew was something of a self-styled elite. Rick Griffin and Victor Moscoso, two of the San Francisco psychedelic poster artists, were among them, each primarily using the comics format to explore sequential graphic design possibilities, often delightfully. Another was Gilbert Shelton, creator of perhaps the most well known underground comic characters, hapless druggies the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers. Shelton was, and still is, a fine graphic storyteller, and one of the funniest. Some of his humour was satirical,



much of it knockabout, farcical, stoner stuff. In *Zap* he would most frequently delve into a darker realm with the hideous yet strangely loveable Wonder Wart-hog.

The remainder of the team consisted of Robert Williams, Manuel 'Spain' Rodriguez and S. Clay Wilson. Each individually a highly skilled artist, they brought an air of macho to the comic. Williams combined exquisite draughtsmanship with a baroque imagination to create a surreal world in which 'realistically' drawn characters and backgrounds would interact with bizarre cartoon creatures, or everything would look as though it was made of chrome. He was given at times to wild experimentation with panel lay-outs, this blending well with the psychedelia of Griffin and Moscoso. Spain and Wilson each came with variants on a biker mentality – the former with a certain left-wing chic, the latter with a studied amorality.

Like Crumb when he chose to draw extremes of sexuality, S Clay Wilson was keen to push the envelope and defy any form of censorship. Indeed the two also collaborated on other unrestrained publications whose titles, like 'Snatch' and 'Felch', give a fair indication of their content. Unlike Crumb, however, there is little of the humane in Wilson's work. Over the years his tales and drawings of demons, biker dykes, pirates and sleaze-balls have come to seem repetitive and perhaps pointless. The closest thing to warmth is in his use of language, particularly in the mouth of pirate Captain Pissgums or Ruby the Dyke. It's laced with obscenities yet rich, rolling and poetic, with a faint echo of Dylan Thomas.



### 3: Bijou Funnies

And after *Zap*, the deluge.

Mainly produced by a variety of publishers, such as the Print Mint, Last Gasp, Rip Off Press and 'Kitchen Sink', who went into business in the late 60s and early 70s, just listing these comics by name would fill this page. What follows is a dip into some of the more memorable titles, their content and creators.

**Bijou Funnies.** This was one of a large number of anthology titles which, like *Zap*, often centred round a small group of regular contributors, although usually with a more open submissions policy. *Bijou* was one of the longer lasting ones, its run lasting 8 issues.

It centred on a loose grouping of cartoonists from various eastern states who had convened in Chicago. They tended to have a more overtly left wing political agenda, but well tempered by the influence of psychedelic drugs. Amongst them were Skip Williamson, a hard edged absurdist whose main character Snappy Sammy Smoot combined charm with serious levels of psychosis, and Jay Lynch, a man of perhaps gentler sensibilities. Lynch's Nard'n'Pat characters were a stuffy, right-wing gent and his sloganeering, left-wing radical cat. Robert Crumb, immensely prolific in those times, was another regular contributor.

**Bogey Man.** The first issue of this comic was all the work of one of the underground's less than mentally stable figures, a man named Rory Hayes. Though his work entirely lacks the professional sheen of his more well known contemporaries and it is doubtful whether it would have found widespread publication at any other time, there is a curious, nightmarish power to its obsessive scenarios and characters: a teddy bear who is eternally the victim of flesh-rotted ghouls and the grotesque Granny Crackbaggy. Two subsequent issues added numerous contributors, but all attempting to submit work that somehow echoed Hayes' unsettling visions. Hayes died in 1983.

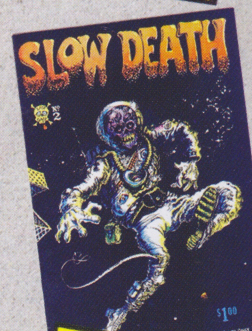
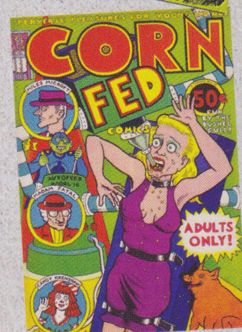
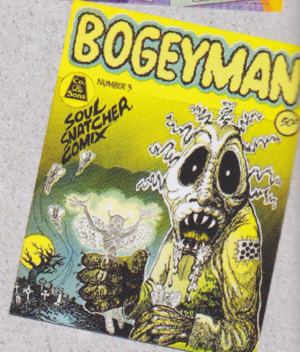
**Cornfed Comics.** A solo work, running to two issues that featured another of the underground's many individualists, Kim Deitch. Deitch had created a crudely drawn but memorable character known as Sunshine Girl for the *East Village Other*, and by the time *Cornfed* appeared, was beginning to demonstrate an improved and highly individualistic cartoon style. Essentially naïve, it has developed in detail and finesse, entirely on its own terms, until many of his pages are works of great beauty. Most of Deitch's stories seem to fit into an overarching continuity – characters such as Miles Mycroft, psychic detective, and Waldo, a malignant black cat who may or may not be an alcoholic's hallucination crop up again and again in his stories. As does Deitch, cultivating a sense that the creator himself has been drawn into the world he has created. Deitch went on to produce work in a variety of titles and anthologies. He has survived the general demise of the underground and still finds publishers for his work to this day.

**Mother's Oats.** Running to two issues, this was one of a number of titles created primarily by a pair of artists/writers, Dave Sheridan and Fred Schrier. Other titles they created were *Meef*, *The Balloon Vendor* and *Tales of the Leather Nun*. Often humorous but with a good deal of hip philosophy thrown into the mix, the work of these two was drenched in psychedelia. Their characters, such as Sheridan's unsightly named Dealer McDope, were perhaps less memorable than the drug induced alternative realities into which they regularly plunged on roller coaster rides through distorted perspectives, op art patterning etc., with the sound effect "Poi!" recurring throughout. All this was rendered beautifully in black and white, with dense fields of stippling providing texture, mist and detail. Sheridan went on to collaborate with Gilbert Shelton on some of the later *Freak Bros.* strips but died of cancer in 1982. Schrier survives, but no longer produces published comic art.

**Skull.** This title was a homage to the EC horror comics such as *Tales from the Crypt* and featured similar twist-ending tales, but with a fair dose of hip references thrown in by various contributors. The stories suffered in comparison to the EC originals, but sometimes made up for it with their gung-ho energy. Prominent contributors were the team of Tom Veitch (writer) and the late Greg Irons. Irons was a fine and extremely hard working artist who had started out doing psychedelic posters, but developed a scratchy, disturbing art style for his stories with Veitch. Such writer/artist collaborations were rare in comics, but TV/GI also contributed to a number of other anthologies, including...

**Slow Death.** With a lot of black humour, *Slow Death* examined ecological matters. Though the term 'global warming' had yet to be coined, it looked at then emerging issues such as pollution, industrialisation and nuclear proliferation, often envisaging harsh, dystopian futures in which individual characters are brought to an awareness of how irreparable their world has become. In Rich Corben's memorable 'How Howie Made It in the Real World' a healthy young man, in his prime in an apparently ideal society, stops taking his 'brain' and 'bod' pills, only to discover that he is really a diseased, malnourished wreck wading through endless heaps of sludge and waste. Few of *Slow Death's* contributors did subtlety. It was later followed by similar titles such as *Corporate Crime Comics* – staking out territory claimed years later by Michael Moore.

**Wimmen's Comix.** Women such as Willy Mendes, Trina Robbins and Shary Flenniken had contributed to the underground comics from the start, but had often had to contend with exclusive, 'boys' club' mindset that too often prevailed. It was, however, a testament to the libertarian principles inherent in this field of publishing, that they were able to create, control and market the long-running *Wimmen's Comics*, along with sister anthology *Tits and Clits* and a number of other titles. Some notable contributors were Aline Kominsky, who specialised in close observation of American Jewish family life; Mary Fleener, a painter, who applied her ornate 'cubismo' drawing style to mainly autobiographical stories; and Dodgem Logic's own Melinda Gebbie who explored disturbing extremes of sexuality and imagination with unique, ornate and ever-varying artwork.





#### 4: Cosmic Comics

The work of American underground cartoonists soon began to appear in the UK, with material reprinted in the first British underground magazines, *International Times* and *Oz*. It could be argued that the impact of these comic strips on readers here was far greater, given our general lack of familiarity with the underground's American precedents, and the lack of our own. There was little in *Eagle* or the *Beano* that could have prepared us for this.

But the possibilities were soon being investigated by a small group of UK artists, whose strips began to appear in the UK alternative press. Then, in July 1970, *Cyclops* appeared, billed as 'The first English Adult Comic Paper.' In a tabloid format, like *IT*, it reprinted a little work by Americans but mainly featured the work of home-grown creators. Its centre-spread was a serialised strip, 'The Unspeakable Mr Hart', scripted by William Burroughs (resident in the UK at the time) and drawn by Malcolm McNeill. It also featured work by *Oz/IT* contributors such as Ray Lowry (whose strips combined collaged photographic material with his own highly stylised drawings), poster artist Martin Sharp, Edward Barker and jazz artist Mal Dean. Sadly, it lasted for but 4 monthly issues.

Of greater longevity was the *IT* funded *Nasty Tales* which first appeared in 1971. Playing a little safer, it regularly reprinted material of by then established popularity by the likes of Crumb and Gilbert Shelton. Edward (a.k.a. 'Edweird') Barker was back, with his tales of seedy hippy low-lives and his glazed aliens the Largactilites (named after a then heavily used 'chemical-cosh' type psychiatric drug). *Nasty Tales* also featured the slick artwork of Chris Welch, whose post-apocalyptic biker fantasy 'Ogoth and Ugly Boot' promised to be a major epic, but never quite delivered.

In 1972 it was joined by *Cosmic Comics* – the first of a series of titles published by 'H Bunch', an *Oz* offshoot, and an early business venture of eventual magazine millionaire Felix Dennis. To the growing roster of UK creators, it added Mike Weller, whose *The Firm* was drawn in a highly individual, clear line style. Weller's political leanings were not too hard to pick out as he portrayed the inhumanities of the capitalist system. Another of the group of new UK artists who contributed to the H Bunch titles (*Zip*, *Animal Weirdness* and *Dope Fiend Funnies* amongst others) was William Rankin – a.k.a. Wyndham Raine – whose stylish and precise artwork travelled down some peculiar avenues, as in 'So Realist Cartoons', which featured a dialogue between Eamon and Algy, a pair of effete 'society armchairs'.

Amongst the contributors to H Bunch publications was also Dave Gibbons, one of a few who were to make the transition to mainstream comics. Another was Bryan Talbot, who made his debut in the underground field with his self published *Brainstorm Comix* in 1975. *Brainstorm* featured 'Chester Hackenbush, Psychedelic Alchemist'. It will come as no surprise to those of you who have read this far, that Hackenbush turned out to be something of a drug enthusiast. Both Gibbons and Talbot went on to develop more distinctive styles and storytelling skills in subsequent work outside the underground.

There were, by this time, numerous small print-run undergrounds appearing regionally, put together enthusiastically by would-be Crumbs and Sheltons, but seldom amounting to more than pastime entertainment for the seriously stoned. One exception however was the Birmingham Arts Lab, which published *Street Comix* – edited and contributed to by the extraordinary Hunt Emerson. Emerson, like many of his contemporaries across the Atlantic, was an enthusiastic admirer of George Herriman's 'Krazy Kat' cartoons and his early work made no secret of this, lifting backgrounds and visual devices from the old newspaper strip's Coconino County setting. But Emerson was also a superb humourist and as his own rich and intensely plastic cartoon style evolved, his comics were among the few guaranteed to raise loud and frequent laughter.

The Arts Lab also published *Heroine*, a UK variant of *Wimmen's Comics* et al, featuring all female contributors, one of the most prominent being Suzy Varty. By the late 70s and early 80s, when these comics appeared, punk had made its breakthrough, purging hippies of their claim to cool. Comic styles were changing too. *Heroine* and *Sour Cream*, another women's collective publication, were as much a herald of these new developments as they were a feminist reaction to the often sexist undergrounds.

Indeed, both here and in America, the concept of 'underground comic' was starting to lose its distinction. Mainstream book publishers, for example, were producing lavish collections of the most accomplished of the underground artists' works. In the UK, one attempt to straddle both new markets and old was made by the enterprising 'Knockabout' company.

Knockabout's Tony Bennett began by publishing UK issues of the *Freak Brothers* comics in the late 70s, before setting up the imprint with a wider remit around 1980. Flagship anthology *Knockabout Comics* appeared in standard comic format for a number of years before moving into the spined book format in which Tony and wife/business partner Carol had, with greater financial success, published collections and graphic novels. Best sellers were the established favourites from the underground world, Crumb and Shelton and the UK's Hunt Emerson – with all of whom the company remains associated to this day.

Like *Nasty Tales* and the H Bunch range before it, the anthology contained a mix of American reprints and new work by UK creators. In addition, comic strips from outside the English speaking world were translated and added to the mix. But, by the mid 80s new names were appearing in the contents listings, names such as Eddie Campbell, Glen Dakin, Trevis Phoenix and Ed Pinsent. These guys, along with many of the women anthologised in *Heroine* and *Sour Cream*, constituted a kind of 'new wave' that was breaking in the UK. It shared a good many features with the underground: an emphasis on self-publication and the associated freedom of expression being one, the highly individual styles of its artists being another. Yet also there was a sense that things had moved on.

Gone was the blatant sexism and the urge to shock with drugs and excess. In its place was more of an 'arthouse' sensibility – greater experimentation with formats, storytelling technique etc. This tendency led at times to obscurity and pretentiousness, but on the whole marked a more mature and interesting approach to comic art. A 'coming of age' perhaps.

Across the Atlantic, similar developments were taking place.





In the early 70s you could reckon to go to any city in the UK or the US and find, somewhere on the edge of the centre, at least one 'head shop', selling dope paraphernalia, incense, ethnic clothing, hippy bric-a-brac, books, a few records and underground comics. If there was a music festival in the locale, the proprietors would decamp there and set up stall amongst the purveyors of brown rice and veggie burgers, pottery and herbal remedies. Specialist comics' shops were still a rarity, there was the occasional alternative bookshop, but primarily you got your undergrounds from the head shop vendor.

The fantasy was that head shops and the like constituted an alternative economy that would co-exist with the 'straight' world for the remainder of our lifetimes and beyond. A fantasy this remained, as times and fashions changed, not to mention the running costs of near city centre premises. Gradually the head shops began to disappear.

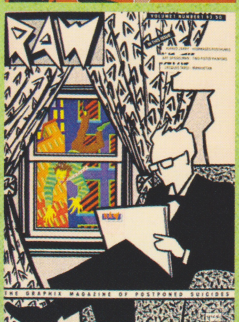
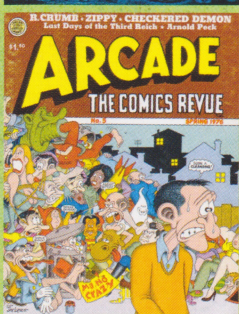
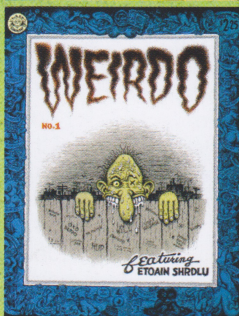
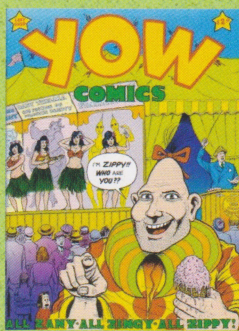
Meanwhile, comics production costs were going up. It was no longer possible to sell undergrounds for just 50 cents a shot, further deterring casual buyers. It was the start of a slump. Perceptions were changing. In the words of Art Spiegelman: "... Somehow, what had seemed like a revolution simply deflated into a lifestyle. Underground comics were stereotyped as dealing only with sex, dope and cheap thrills. They got stuffed back into the closet, along with bong pipes and love beads..."

Spiegelman had been a part of the *Bijou Funnies* group and had distinguished himself with works in a number of undergrounds that played on genre, such as the trenchcoat detective saga in 'Ace Hole - Midget Detective'. A brief strip he contributed to one anthology transposed the cartoon conventions of cats oppressing mice onto the harsh reality of the Nazis' wartime concentration camps. He called it 'Maus' and later expanded it into graphic novel format, drawing extensively on the first hand experiences of his father. A powerful and inevitably disturbing piece of work, it reached out, on publication, from the underground to the mainstream and an eventual Pulitzer Prize.

Spiegelman brought a distinctly intellectual approach to his work, an approach shared by Bill Griffith, creator of the last of the characters with whom this piece began, the extraordinary Zippy the Pinhead. Based in part on the microcephalic characters from Tod Browning's cult movie *Freaks*, Zippy shares something in common with the character 'Mullah Nasrudin' in Sufi teaching stories, the ability to be both a sage and a fool, a profound idiot. Griffith used the character to comment extensively on American politics, fashion and consumerism. His drawing style was crude, at first, but he worked hard to perfect it and by the mid 70s, Zippy was becoming more widely known - one of his catchphrases, "Are we having fun yet?" even making it into a dictionary of quotations. From the mid 80s, it became a syndicated strip in US newspapers - though it remains baffling to many of its readers.

In an effort to resist the slump, Spiegelman and Griffith put together *Arcade*. Billed as 'The Comics Review' it was printed up in a larger magazine size and on quality paper, in an attempt

## 5: Arcadians



to attract wider distribution. Drawing high quality work from most of the major underground artists, it was arguably one of the greatest artistic successes of the movement. In addition, each issue featured an archive section, exposing largely forgotten work by those who had influenced its creators, giving readers a chance to see where some of this radical stuff had roots.

There were high hopes for *Arcade*, but sadly it failed to find the markets it sought, and folded after only 7 issues. The slump prevailed, despite a little boom in comics by punk/new wave inspired artists in the late 70s. Whilst Griffith drew back from publishing ventures at this point, Spiegelman sought to make further radical changes in format and content with his next venture: *Raw*.

From 1980 to 1994 *Raw* appeared, its first incarnation being in a large 11"x14" format, as shared by NY art magazines of the period. Dropping the 'c' word, it presented as a 'graphix' magazine, and though now familiar undergrounders occasionally contributed, it attempted to push the envelope into a kind of high art. Co-editor Francoise Mouly brought a European sensibility to the mix, along with work from creators such as Joost Swarte and Jacques Tardi. Later appearing in a smaller, more literary format, *Raw* provided early exposure for the likes of Lynda Barry, Charles Burns, Mark Beyer and Sue Coe.

Robert Crumb's work had appeared in both *Arcade* and *Raw*. Perhaps thus inspired, he saw fit to launch his own anthology, *Weirdo*, in 1981. Another magazine sized publication, *Weirdo* shared some of the aspirations but fewer of the pretensions of *Raw*, devoting a large proportion of its pages to showcasing the work of up-and-coming creators. To Crumb's further credit, given the 'sexist' reputation he had previously acquired, female contributors such as Dori Seda, Carol Tyler and Diāne Noomin were welcome and frequent. For a period of *Weirdo*'s relatively long run, the editorial reins were handed over to Aline Kominsky (by then Crumb's wife), who was in turn followed by frequent contributor Peter Bagge. In many ways, *Weirdo* sustained and fulfilled the remit with which *Arcade* began.

Crumb's own work, by this time, had reached an extraordinary maturity. He experimented to some degree with styles and techniques, but it was more that he had refined and finessed his own utterly characteristic drawings with subtle hatching and texture. He could be as savage and acerbic as he ever was, and did not relinquish the opportunity for the occasional romp in the play-pen of his sexual fantasies, but there was increasing depth in his observation, a sense of humanity and soulfulness that pervaded his work.

Once again, however, as in the UK, we have reached the point in the development of comics where the term 'underground' no longer carries any great meaning. Those who started out in the late 60s, if still alive and still choosing to write and draw comics, are generally able to find publication by a slew of 'ground-level' companies that have been set up, often - like Knockabout - by enthusiasts for their work. Their ranks have been swelled, as we've seen, by new creators who've built on the ground they trailblazed. They are respected, but no longer distinct. For, by the 1990s, comics have changed...



## 6: Dredd'n'Heads'

IPC/Fleetway's *2000AD* was launched in 1977 (when the year 2000AD actually still seemed quite a long way away!). This UK comic was not at first an obvious and totally radical departure from the many weekly boys' adventure titles that had been staple Fleetway fare since the 50s, but the seeds were there from the start. Though the creators had to steer clear of the overtly sexual elements (and invent their own swear words), there was not much about the early appearances of flagship characters such as Judge Dredd, Strontium Dog or, later, Nemesis that could not have featured in *Slow Death* or *Nasty Tales*. It was clear that the writers and artists who'd collaborated on these strips had read and enjoyed underground comics, and clear too that they shared the same subversive attitudes, the same desire to produce finely drawn and thought provoking material for an audience that fully included adults.

Within a year or two, *2000AD* began to attract artists who had been involved with the UK undergrounds themselves – the likes of Brian Bolland, Dave Gibbons, Bryan Talbot and Kevin O'Neill becoming regulars on its pages. Here, it becomes essential to mention one Mr Moore of this parish. As a writer making early career steps in *2000AD* at this time, he brings not only a sense of what the undergrounds have achieved, but also a perception of where they have failed, and just how much further this thing could go. He's young, he's lean, he's hungry (well, actually, he always looked pretty well fed to me) and he's a man with a mission to take it all the way...

To cut a long and complex developmental story to the nub, one thing soon becomes all too clear. Despite their editorial willingness to embrace the new, as far as matters of creators' rights and payments go, IPC/Fleetway and contemporaneous UK publishers are still living in the 1950s, or possibly the Dark Ages. Our post underground creators start to feel well and truly fucked over. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, there are editors at one-time-dinosaur DC Comics who are paying some attention to what's going on. Seeing an opportunity, they start to beckon, with dollars in their hands.

The rest, as they say, is history. Well, comics' history, anyway. But aside from the subsequent 'British Invasion' of US comics, there are other threads to follow here, regarding the way in which underground sensibilities reached the mainstream in the 80s and 90s.

Rich Corben, whose *Slow Death* stories have been mentioned, was a contributor to a number of undergrounds such as *Fever Dreams* and *Fantagor*. Their SF/fantasy content bore similarities to work you might have seen in France's then prestigious *Métal Hurlant* magazine, and indeed found favour with many European readers. Corben went on to become a regular contributor to *Heavy Metal*, the US version of *MH* that launched in the early 70s. Another *HM* contributor was writer/artist Rick Veitch, brother of Tom, who'd previously seen print with an underground zombie world epic. On the editorial staff was Lou Stathis, an underground aficionado and sometime collaborator with artists such as Rick Geary, Matt Howarth and Peter Kuper – who were gaining a following in the immediate wake of the undergrounds.

Following Alan Moore's ground breaking and hugely successful revamp of DC's *Swamp Thing*, Rick Veitch was drafted in to continue the writing, thus further deepening the *Swamp Thing*'s status as a kind of neo-underground comic. Within a year or two, DC had launched its 'Vertigo' line, a somewhat flawed attempt to pitch product to the adult comic market. Herein, along with wave after wave of the Brits on exodus from *2000AD*, work was found for Corben, for Tom Veitch and for Stathis as an editor.

And for many more. Like Kuper and Howarth, they filtered in from a US comics publishing scene that had diversified and expanded through the 1980s – as exemplified by then new imprints such

as Fantagraphics. Paralleling Knockabout in the UK, Fantagraphics published a wide range of material, from underground, historic and overseas sources to cutting edge new work – most notably The Hernandez Brothers' *Love and Rockets*, which would probably have been underground had it appeared 10 years earlier.

You could call it an infiltration – wild and subversive creators sneaking into that very bastion of conservative comics publishing, the home of Superman, Batman et al. You could call it a corporate buy out – slick young men and women in 80s business attire who sought to make a lot of money out of those very same wild and subversive creators.

Both views hold some truth, and whichever way you looked at it, there was one thing they had in common. Everyone had high hopes. Comics in the US and the UK were on the point of breaking through to a mass adult market. Or so it seemed. In fact, other than the material created by the biggest names, Moore and Neil 'Sandman' Gaiman (his closest follow-up), very little of it achieved that hoped for mass public impact. Sales failed to impress the accountants. Almost everyone involved was left struggling.

Whilst researching this piece I came across an interview with Tony Bennett of Knockabout. "I'm not sure that the UK scene has really improved at all..." he says, "There are still only a handful of comic publishers in the UK and the largest of those only reprints American books."

All of which appears to contradict my opening contention, but it remains the case when I walk into a Waterstones or browse Amazon I see (admittedly amongst the dross) worthwhile, interesting and intelligent comic strip material that once I would have struggled to find. And it's to this change the undergrounds have contributed.

They've made me laugh; they've made me cringe. They've got me thinking and feeling; they've been tedious and dull. They've had my eyeballs boggling in their sockets as I gaze at graphic brilliance; they've been scrappy and incomprehensible. Since the underground comics came along, things have never been quite the same. I wouldn't have missed them for the world. And what I've acquired of them, I won't be selling on eBay.





MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT...



THE NEXT MORNING...

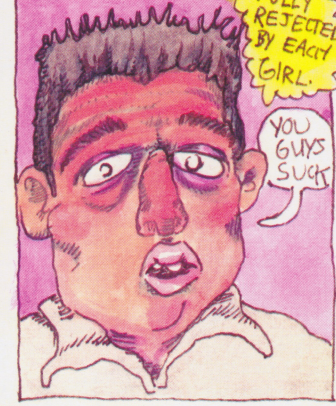


# POINTLESS DREAM COMICS by ERIC RIVERA...

A GROUP OF BOYS ARE AT A SCHOOL DANCE, EYING YOUNG GIRLS...



THEY MOVE TO DANCE AND EVERYONE FINDS A PARTNER EXCEPT THE FAT BOY, WHO IS FULLY REJECTED BY EACH GIRL.



30 YEARS LATER... HE RUNS AN UNSUCCESSFUL SINGLES NIGHT CLUB. HE'S STILL FAT AND IRONICALLY REMAINS SINGLE HIMSELF.



ALMOST NO ONE COMES. THOSE THAT DO, COME WITH FRIENDS (THOUGH IT'S SUPPOSEDLY A STRICTLY SINGLE CLUB)...



...OR ARE COMPLETELY LEERING SOLO CREEPS.



I'M A MAN...



I SCOPE OUT THE CLUB THROUGH THE WINDOW OF A BURGER KING NEXT DOOR...



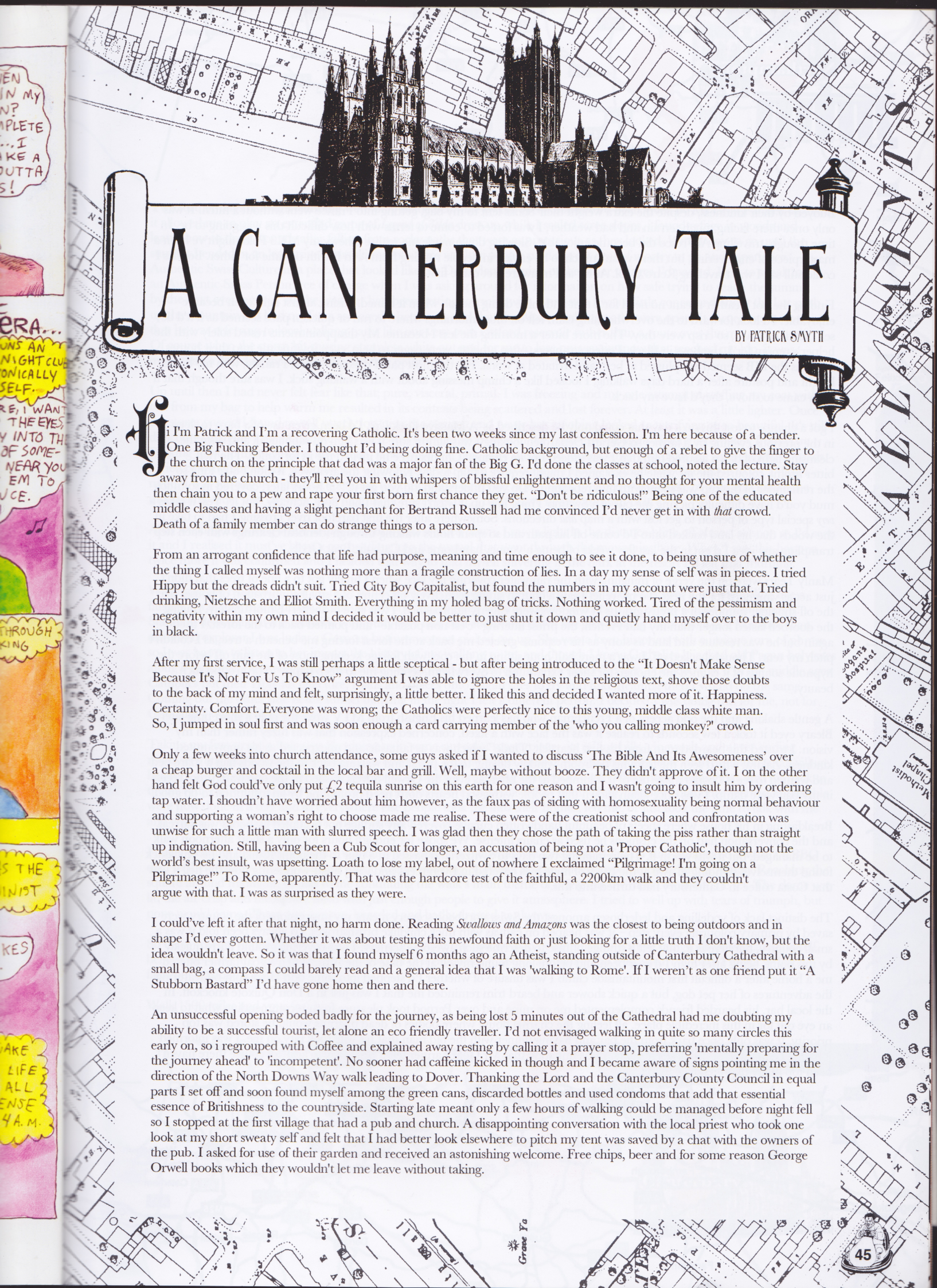
A GROUP OF FAT FRIENDS LEAVE THE BAR TOGETHER...



THE MAIN GUY DRINKS AT A TINY TABLE AS THE LAST PARTIES FILE OUT, READING A CHAUVINIST DATING GUIDEBOOK.







# A CANTERBURY TALE

BY PATRICK SMYTH

**H**i I'm Patrick and I'm a recovering Catholic. It's been two weeks since my last confession. I'm here because of a bender. One Big Fucking Bender. I thought I'd be doing fine. Catholic background, but enough of a rebel to give the finger to the church on the principle that dad was a major fan of the Big G. I'd done the classes at school, noted the lecture. Stay away from the church - they'll reel you in with whispers of blissful enlightenment and no thought for your mental health then chain you to a pew and rape your first born first chance they get. "Don't be ridiculous!" Being one of the educated middle classes and having a slight penchant for Bertrand Russell had me convinced I'd never get in with *that* crowd. Death of a family member can do strange things to a person.

From an arrogant confidence that life had purpose, meaning and time enough to see it done, to being unsure of whether the thing I called myself was nothing more than a fragile construction of lies. In a day my sense of self was in pieces. I tried Hippy but the dreads didn't suit. Tried City Boy Capitalist, but found the numbers in my account were just that. Tried drinking, Nietzsche and Elliot Smith. Everything in my holed bag of tricks. Nothing worked. Tired of the pessimism and negativity within my own mind I decided it would be better to just shut it down and quietly hand myself over to the boys in black.

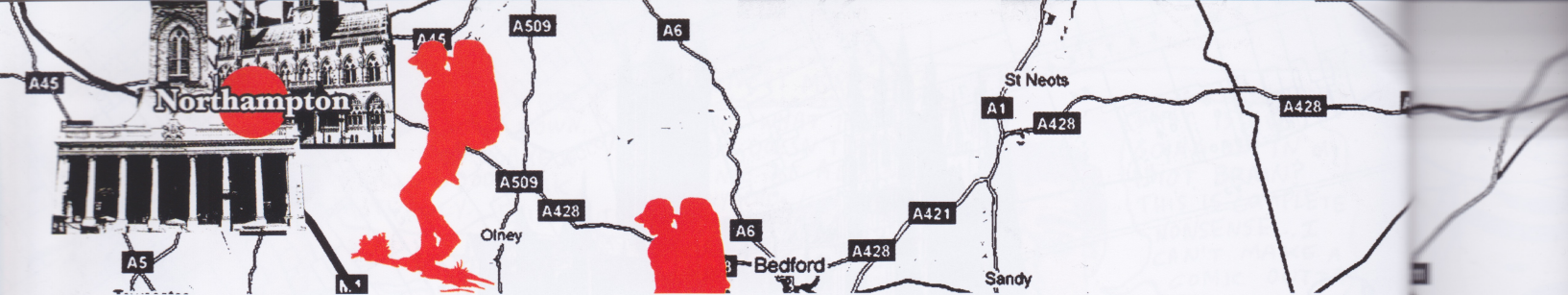
After my first service, I was still perhaps a little sceptical - but after being introduced to the "It Doesn't Make Sense Because It's Not For Us To Know" argument I was able to ignore the holes in the religious text, shove those doubts to the back of my mind and felt, surprisingly, a little better. I liked this and decided I wanted more of it. Happiness. Certainty. Comfort. Everyone was wrong; the Catholics were perfectly nice to this young, middle class white man. So, I jumped in soul first and was soon enough a card carrying member of the 'who you calling monkey?' crowd.

Only a few weeks into church attendance, some guys asked if I wanted to discuss 'The Bible And Its Awesomeness' over a cheap burger and cocktail in the local bar and grill. Well, maybe without booze. They didn't approve of it. I on the other hand felt God could've only put £2 tequila sunrise on this earth for one reason and I wasn't going to insult him by ordering tap water. I shouldn't have worried about him however, as the faux pas of siding with homosexuality being normal behaviour and supporting a woman's right to choose made me realise. These were of the creationist school and confrontation was unwise for such a little man with slurred speech. I was glad then they chose the path of taking the piss rather than straight up indignation. Still, having been a Cub Scout for longer, an accusation of being not a 'Proper Catholic', though not the world's best insult, was upsetting. Loath to lose my label, out of nowhere I exclaimed "Pilgrimage! I'm going on a Pilgrimage!" To Rome, apparently. That was the hardcore test of the faithful, a 2200km walk and they couldn't argue with that. I was as surprised as they were.

I could've left it after that night, no harm done. Reading *Swallows and Amazons* was the closest to being outdoors and in shape I'd ever gotten. Whether it was about testing this newfound faith or just looking for a little truth I don't know, but the idea wouldn't leave. So it was that I found myself 6 months ago an Atheist, standing outside of Canterbury Cathedral with a small bag, a compass I could barely read and a general idea that I was 'walking to Rome'. If I weren't as one friend put it "A Stubborn Bastard" I'd have gone home then and there.

An unsuccessful opening boded badly for the journey, as being lost 5 minutes out of the Cathedral had me doubting my ability to be a successful tourist, let alone an eco friendly traveller. I'd not envisaged walking in quite so many circles this early on, so I regrouped with Coffee and explained away resting by calling it a prayer stop, preferring 'mentally preparing for the journey ahead' to 'incompetent'. No sooner had caffeine kicked in though and I became aware of signs pointing me in the direction of the North Downs Way walk leading to Dover. Thanking the Lord and the Canterbury County Council in equal parts I set off and soon found myself among the green cans, discarded bottles and used condoms that add that essential essence of Britishness to the countryside. Starting late meant only a few hours of walking could be managed before night fell so I stopped at the first village that had a pub and church. A disappointing conversation with the local priest who took one look at my short sweaty self and felt that I had better look elsewhere to pitch my tent was saved by a chat with the owners of the pub. I asked for use of their garden and received an astonishing welcome. Free chips, beer and for some reason George Orwell books which they wouldn't let me leave without taking.





Buoyed by their kindness, despite the extra weight their books lent to my bag, getting into France went without a hitch. It was only once there facing tough terrain and bad weather, I was forced to come to terms with how difficult this was going to be. In time though, travelling *Al Fresco* did become enjoyable. Slowing down made me realise Chewy my MK3 Polo might've been a masterpiece of engineering, but there wasn't much to be envied in people rushing from A to B with no time for either. Besides I could still say I was travelling Retro Cool. As far as I'm aware feet came first.

Finding the hot weather meant no need for a tent and mine doing the job when it rained. Rising at first light even became enjoyable. I'd look forward to the overwhelming calm felt on those mornings where to run or quicken pace seemed as if it'd be self harm, so sharp, so crisp were they. The more bitter a morning the less I became. My disappointments rested solely with the helper's reppin for J, the Boys in Black. Perfect strangers, often atheists, were eager to help, even inviting me into their homes, whereas the BIB seemed nonplussed at best, and irritated at worst. For the most part I'd excuse them. Frankly, with my beard, height and posture after a hard days walking, I looked like a chimp messing about with a walking stick. I was sure though that if push came to shove, they'd have my back.

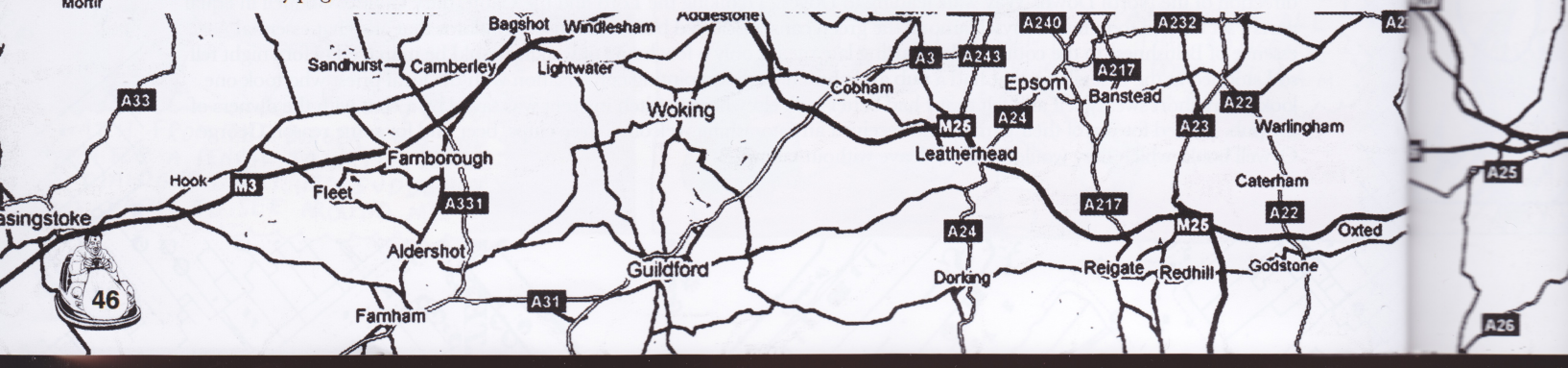
I got a chance to test this on a day that could only be described as 'A Massive Fuck Up'. I'd been given use of a barn to sleep in the previous evening by a farmer so Gerard Depardieu looking I was almost sure it was him on sabbatical, and once the cleansing light of dawn assured him that I was indeed not an escaped Chimpanzee he invited me in for coffee. The rich, bitter aroma coloured the air while he explained I might require a map today. Knowing the area well, it didn't take long so the remainder of the cup was spent with him repeating, "Do you understand, do you get it?!" 9 hours later, covered in so much mud you'd have difficulty picking me out of a Swamp Thing line up, I wasn't sure that I had ever, actually, 'got it'. Yes, it takes a very special type of person to get lost with a map and directions. Somewhere after the first barefoot river crossing I had to take in the woods that his land backed onto I'd come off his path and so spent hours walking through identical clearings with each step trampling any idea I'd got in the last few weeks of being a young, handsome and Catholic Bear Grylls.

Manly Tears were on the verge of mingling with the rainwater covering my face when I finally got to a line of trees that didn't just act as vanguard for the next. To my relief I saw a church sitting seductively off centre of a small conurbation of houses like the off shoulder number of a pretty girl. Its lit windows were eagerly approached, I was sure of shelter. Unfortunately, ringing the doorbell lasted longer than my bad French, the priest uttering "c'est non possible" and pointed back to the forest. I tried again but he was resolute and land as stony as his response greeted me back at the forest forcing me beneath a tree, as I couldn't pitch my tent. Though hacked off, I was a mere half hour sitting in the cool with foliage keeping most of the rain off before the hypnotic sounds of it calmed me enough for sheer exhaustion to overwhelm, sending me to sleep happy to be around such beauty.

A gentle shaking and the odd accent of a Frenchman who has learned his English from MTV woke me only a short time later. Bleary eyed it took a few seconds to realise it was the face with a fixed, concerned expression that was fuzzy rather than my vision. I trusted this bearded man from his first heartfelt "Dude" which was as fantastic and unexpected as his unprompted kindness. Zakira, who'd seen me from his bedroom window talking to the priest and walking back to the woods had a spare bed and wanted to see if I could make use of it. I jumped at the offer, as even the Orwell novels stashed in the one waterproof recess in my bag were damp. I was once again shown that people with good hearts don't need prompting by an institution to do good.

Breakfasting in his house where sheets of beautiful handwritten cursive covered any surface not occupied by books was surreal, and the conversation had on the cushions he used as chairs intense. We spoke for enough hours for only a short afternoon walk to be managed, but it was worth it. The remaining two days to Switzerland passed in a blur to the point Rafiki and his Rucksack found themselves standing in awe at the bases of huge hills covered in Evergreens and icing sugar wondering how the hell it was that Costa coffee in Canterbury had turned into this.

The distinct lack of yodelling and lederhosen amongst the Swiss storybook scenery meant my impressions of the country were saved by primary colouring every step – it was heaped on canvas with thick childlike brushstrokes. I'd always been told it was a small country, but here *in it*, that felt a strange phrase to describe such awesome scenery. I was covering ground fairly quickly by this point, being fitter than I'd ever been and before long found myself at the base of the Alps. When a goat farmer offered me a home after a difficult first mountainside climb I was unsure of whether I'd stepped into some odd Heidi spin-off featuring the adventures of her pet dog, but a quick shower and beard trim reminded me that I was just in a Don Quixote knockoff. In the local bar, his bearded friends complemented me on mine and over Pernod took pleasure from recommending what to keep an eye out for in this incredible place, all feeling the charnel house where bodies of dead pilgrims would be stored was top priority. It was only once back from the bar and having dinner with the old man that his wife took pity on me. I was informed it hadn't been used for hundreds of years. I was unhappy that Mr. Goat Farmer felt it necessary to add "of course there haven't been too many pilgrims since then".





Two further days of tough climbing were only made bearable by the green blanket I'd been given by Mr. Goat Farmer, as it allowed me to play an extended game of *Legend of Zelda* dress up while I scaled scree slopes, i found refuge in woods and learnt how to dress wounds after falling from rocky paths that were as precarious as they looked. With 1 day to go until the summit I ended in an 'exclusive Swiss ski resort' where wealthy people paid a great deal of money to ski and experience Authentic Swiss Culture in a place that looked like the Disneyland version of the other villages I'd passed. I got to speak to an Authentic Swiss Person free of charge when I was asking around for information on how safe trying to reach the summit by the next evening was. As the weather had been getting stormier with every step I was a little concerned about the last push up the mountain but had my fears assuaged when I was told that the Alpine walking paths were open. It turned out however that he was referring to local walking paths like our very own Pitsford reservoir rather than a route over the mountain itself. Of course when the storm hit causing complete white out and for me to lose my way in snow that reached my hip, it was more than a little late for clarification on that point.

Up until then I had never felt fear like that; pure, visceral, primal. I was freezing and my one attempt at stuffing my coat with bits from my bag to help warm me resulted in its contents being scattered and lost forever. At least it was a little lighter. Once the storm passed I found myself utterly lost near the summit and never has anything looked so terrifying or so beautiful. It's still difficult to imagine I spent 10 hours up there just wondering around in the cold - my thoughts flicking alternately from 'You Fucking Idiot' to marvelling at how clean, how white and how pure the world looked when free from the stranglehold of roads. I tried praying but for the first time in a while I just heard them echo back as I slowly realised they'd nowhere to go. I didn't mind. I was starting to think that spending too much time worrying about God, or labels was a waste of time and unlike the mountains, older and stronger than anything I'd set eyes on, I didn't have nearly as much of it.

After walking for a long while in any direction that seemed down, I saw a light in the distance blink off almost as soon as I'd seen it and I realised it must've been a car heading into the tunnel that went through the mountains base. When I saw this happen twice more it was confirmed and I headed that way to find myself shivering in the dark at the resort I'd left that morning.

Waking to the realisation that I'd have to hitch my way through the mountain rather than walk over it left me feeling like a failure. I was sure that Quixote, Rafiki or anyone with enough common sense to check the weather could've conquered it. Standing dejectedly at the roadside with puffy eyes and snot streaming down my face looking more like a sick Manatee than distressed explorer I was lucky a German businesswoman picked me up. She was a keen historian with a unique turn of phrase so I was happy to listen to her impart the history of my walking route, and though I knew Catholics hijacked old Pagan holy sites along it to spread their religious ideas I hadn't considered its consequences for me. With her, I decided that if in the middle ages Catholics put their Holy architecture, roads and places onto pagan sites to try and find meaning then I would do the same. Coming out the other side of the tunnel blinking in the light I felt a different person. I decided I was doing this for me, not for God, and I was just fine with that.

Taking my first steps in Italy was like doing so in some surrealist masterpiece; its rolling hills, vineyards and never ending roads seeming like a defiant last stand of an older time. I came across ruins of roman churches, epic cathedrals and small village beauties and wondered why it was people spent so much time paying homage to a god who's done nothing but turn his back to them. Why did we need these buildings to remind us how to treat our fellow man? Here, distances that once seemed impossible were now done in a day and as everywhere else people took me into their homes, fed me, or just took the time to talk with me and within 5 weeks I found myself on the outskirts of Rome.

Finally treading the streets of Rome was fairly anticlimactic but what was I expecting? I'm no Ray Mears and it wasn't a BBC doc, so there was no moody classical music to give reaching St.Peters Square added importance. I did try though. Reaching the square around midnight, thanks to me continuing the walk's main theme of being lost the mood looked to be set. The dome was lit, the air crisp and the square filled with just enough people to give it atmosphere. I tried to well up with tears of triumph, but none would come. There was just me, bearded and badly dressed as always.

So there you go, hopefully there's no chance of a relapse but you have to be careful about these things. I'll be watching myself, believe me. Like anything though it was one hell of a ride while it lasted, and doing the walk wasn't all bad. I might've lost a faith but I gained a little truth.

Walk 1500 miles and your feet hurt.

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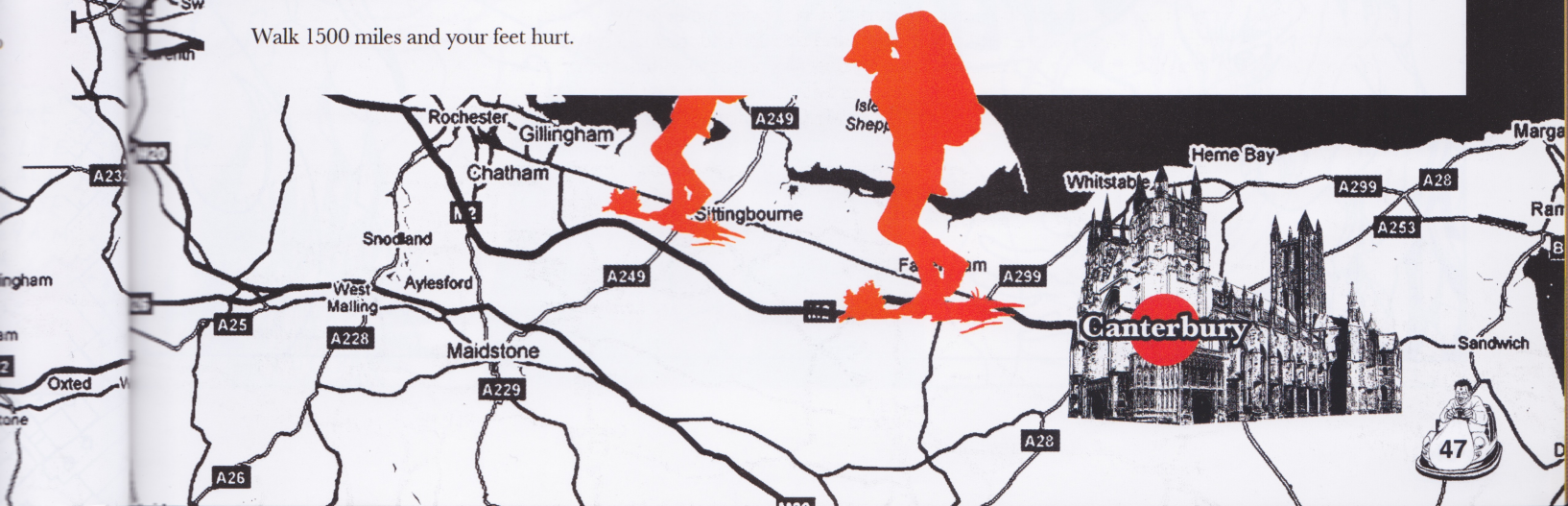
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Walk 1500 miles and your feet hurt.





LOUIS WAIN  
SAVX + DAVID QUANTICK

I VISITED THE ARTIST LOUIS WAIN AT HIS HOME. MISTER WAIN HAS ACHIEVED FAME AND SUCCESS THROUGH DRAWING AND PAINTING





AIN  
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... WHO HAS MADE WAIN SUCH A SUCCESS!



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TBC





# THE MAGNETIC AXIOM

Unspooling the value of the tape vaults

with Gary Mills

As anyone who lives in a house that looks directly out onto the street might testify, our relationship with modern technology is somewhat confused. Here, kids will pace by, parading their cutting edge credentials in full earshot via implausibly compressed audio, piped out through the sleekest of deaf aid interfaces and agitated handsets. For those reared on low bandwidths, the emotional pull of the gadget's attractive design and symbolic appeal is all; the quality of the sound, no more dynamic or expansive than the fucked-off fizz of a canned wasp, is of no real consequence in comparison. An electronics industry that clings to the utter folly of 'high definition' entertainment ("don't just watch TV – *really* watch TV!") is clearly persuasive enough. But beneath the over-arching style, what of the substance?

Commercially available electronics – mobile phones, mp3 players or digital TV receivers – are increasingly multi-faceted, with the common function being the facility to capture both still and moving images. However, this technology is not properly exploited; despite an increase in affordability, we are not necessarily likely to take the process of recording any more seriously, or more pertinently, hold on to what we record. Of course, the servers of Facebook, YouTube and Flickr will groan under the weight of privately captured "mates" photos and videos, but dredging these for any social commentary in amongst the shitfaced snapshot tedium would be a thankless task. This cursory hedonism and self-absorption may well be all-encompassing themes of the moment, but they offer little evidence of the wider spirit of the times or any evolution thereof. Our throwaway society places little value in archiving, and in an age characterised by consumerism and the submission of a tucked-in shirt as evidence of obsessive behaviour bordering on mental illness, the grand pursuit instead has become the rush to avoid obsolescence.

If the kudos of owning these new tools and staying abreast – if not of an assumed progress in technology, then more likely the advances in contemporary product design – far outweighs any real curiosity for recording, then why should we catalogue at all? As the inevitable price for an impatience to upgrade shows itself in another race against time, namely the safeguarding of forgotten recordings endangered merely out of association with the antiquated formats which accommodate them, we might do well to consider the benefits of the visual social document.


The cliché of a fanatical yet strangely joyless uncle freezing time with epic, murderously dull presentations of caravanning holiday slides may offer proof that technology's proliferation hasn't made worse photographers or cameramen of us after all. But the hit rate here of key cultural, political or economical touchstones amidst the fogged stills of hillocks, walls – and indeed fog – would most probably have been considerably higher. When cine cameras and projectors were far less attainable, their relative prestige inspired a conscientiousness of care now lost through sheer accessibility and reliance on credit. And nor was such acquisition so intrinsically lifestyle or design led, even if you did own one of the functionalist 'D' series of slide projectors created by Dieter Rams for Braun.

As the absolute uniqueness of the recording process waned in its thrill from rarefied analogue spools to the now ubiquitous yet untouchable digital platform, much got lost along the way. Deft ergonomics and surface sheen have cemented their place in the home (or in the pocket), and obscured recording's innovation to the point of outright indifference on the part of whoever's behind the viewfinder. In the days before the cult of the individual tightened its grip, the family auteur displayed a keener sense of investigation for the world around him. The precise scope and range of his lens however would far exceed the parochial interests of a mere family gathering or community event.

Whilst the intention to provide serious, lasting social commentary would doubtlessly have been fairly rare, the amateur photographer's appetite for his environment ensured that more than his original purpose for capturing events found its way onto film. At the peripheries of the frame of the earliest home movies, the narrative threads of a nation's life were unknowingly unfurled. Evidence of once dominant industries, customs and fashions were documented in a way that commercial media couldn't – or wouldn't – deign to oversee. Britain's tumultuous relationship with modernist planning and architecture will have found its way onto celluloid during a narrow lifespan, as would the emergent popular culture – now invested with its own sense of heritage and antiquity.

These are also the kinds of clips that regional depositories have recently begun to thrive on. In 2002, ITV Anglia compiled miles of domestic recordings collated at the East Anglian Film Archive for its *The Way We Were* series, which charted the changes in local





family life between the 1920s and 1970s. The Media Archive for Central England – MACE – is now undertaking a similar lottery-sponsored project with assistance from the BBC, whose own *Great British Home Movie Roadshow* has just come to an end. These initiatives have materialised partly out of a concerted wish to educate communities, an unofficial and somewhat disparate information board if you like, instructing society as to what their own recordings may contain, the value in preserving them, and, perhaps implicitly, of the difference between their privately shot material and that crafted by the broadcast media.

The steadily developing interest in amateur recordings gained its biggest surge in popularity in 2005, when a vault of negatives shot by two topical filmmakers was assembled into *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon* by the BBC a decade after discovery. These turn of the 20th Century street scene reels weren't captured on a recreational basis however, the titular producers helming a pioneering commercial firm. Vast transformations in the world of entertainment and its *modus operandi* have since made those embryonic forays with the medium look anything but corporate.

Documentary makers have of course in the main displayed a greater preparedness to authentically reflect the shifting sands of social life. Norman Cohen's *The London Nobody Knows* from 1967 is an at times plaintive elegy to decrepit Victoriana, shot precisely when the city's transformation from bombed-out husk to modern financial and cultural hotbed took shape. Actor James Mason tours the blackened backstreets of Spitalfields, virtually untouched since Jack the Ripper's deeds some 80 years previously, and ponders the rotting shell of Camden's Bedford Theatre. Scenes of music hall buskers look almost prehistoric in the year of *Sgt. Pepper*, *Piper* at the *Gates of Dawn* and the founding of Milton Keynes' new town, yet oddly the sight of drunks caught brawling appears similarly staged. Even better still is the extraordinary *Up* series of recurring broadcasts, reporting on the evolving fortunes of 14 people from the age of 7 years old and appearing every 7 years since. The original *Seven Up* documentary in 1964 captured children whose wide-eyed aspirations in some cases saw them dictating society's path: for most however it was humanity's ebb and flow that would shape them. Arguably the most fascinating participant, Neil Hughes, had drifted out of society altogether by the late 1970s, a promising and fiercely intelligent child turned homeless and troubled in adulthood. Neil did however become the only individual to enter politics, standing as a Lib Dem candidate in Carlisle at the 2010 General Election.

Television however has flexed its own considerable and more malign powers of influence in the years since Hughes and his contemporaries first transmitted their innocent ambition. Celebrity culture has explicitly propelled the illusion of the medium to the fore, and has of course also cemented our obsession over this last decade with the deceit of 'reality'.

Never before has the insincerity of the broadcast agenda been so blatantly exposed or editorial responsibility invested with so much control. A judicious rearranging of *Big Brother* footage can tell a brand new story regardless of how the contributors have behaved, yet our thirst for such manipulation knows no bounds. Increasingly, the involvement of 'real' people has however diminished in favour of so-called celebrity participants; the fact that they inhabit everyday situations and events – in appearance at least – can't bridge the distance between the entertainment world and the mundanity that we strive so hard to depart. We think we're becoming closer to those we idolise, yet it

is in the interests of the industry to maintain the gulf. The clamour for fame and its attendant vacuum of triviality has set the tone for a quasi-Theatre of Cruelty, a warped forum for a society rapt with an unfulfilled yearning for adulation, where delusion, petulance and antagonism are the sole modes of expression: Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* incarnate. The slenderest view of talent that then informs the *X Factor* culture provides a further fuel to the kind of anti-intelligence which precludes a collective inclination to archive. Once again society finds its solace in the empty status of hardware, and the elevation of gadgets and devices to badges of affluence and popularity, instruments of mere rank rather than genuine cultural clout.

Should you wish to embark upon a comparatively more righteous path of audiovisual archaeology – a delving if you like into slightly less venal recorded broadcasting territory – then the law of averages dictates that a recovering of bygone hardware is essential. Working Betamax or Betacord units are fairly abundant, as is the relevant removable media. Bearing obscure, scientific legends such as 'epitaxial', 'beridox' and 'super avilyn' (references to the magnetic alloys and crystals that give the tapes their recordability), these cassettes are generally to be found in good condition, though caution is advised should any Hauntological mould appear on the tape heads. Less common are functioning Video 2000 models (a short-lived double-sided tape standard, essentially a video version of the audio cassette) or the earlier Philips VCR N1500 and N1700 machines, accommodating huge square brick-like cassettes whose two reels sat one atop the other rather than side-by-side.

Everything can be digitised with the right configuration of co-axials and adaptors, though the newest technology encourages us to downsize and discard these obsolete collections. Soon there will be nothing left. The curiosity and sense of adventure that assisted the acquiring of hardware in the past has been irretrievably deadened by the ubiquity of modern equivalents: in 1981, when the home video boom really began to take off, very few domestic recorders were available for under £500 (a whole month's average wage back then – a commensurate amount now would get you three iPads), whilst most pre-recorded tapes cost between £30 & £40. We can now attach more recorded information than you could fit on a videocassette or film reel to an email, and entire collections to a USB stick costing just a few pounds. Such attainability has however brought with it a sense of idle introspection. Why bother?

As physical artefacts in themselves have become outmoded (the music and print industries suffering in particular) and the facility to transfer files to intangible digital platforms has provided us with the new norm of personal archiving, so has the interest in holding on to cumbersome master recordings declined. The space on a hard drive seems infinite in comparison with the domestic clutter of shelves stuffed full with cassettes, discs and paper ephemera, and the delete button is henceforth only a click away. Concerns over the ethics of disposal and subsequent landfill therefore diminish in the long-term. So too however does the romance of collectability or any trace of the sensuous.

If our respect for a true factual record of our times is to endure, then society's attitude to the visual medium has to change. Until the concept of technology as a force for documentation and not straight vanity is acknowledged, then the purity of such an ideal seems threatened. Soon we will grow to resemble all those plasma screens, our electronic paraphernalia informing our own personal means of display and nothing else, mutations of commodity fetishism. We will not be worth watching.



# eat majoris

You can't take the eat out of death...  
that spelling is fixed.  
Sure as day on the skeleton sets  
both are forever at your neck...

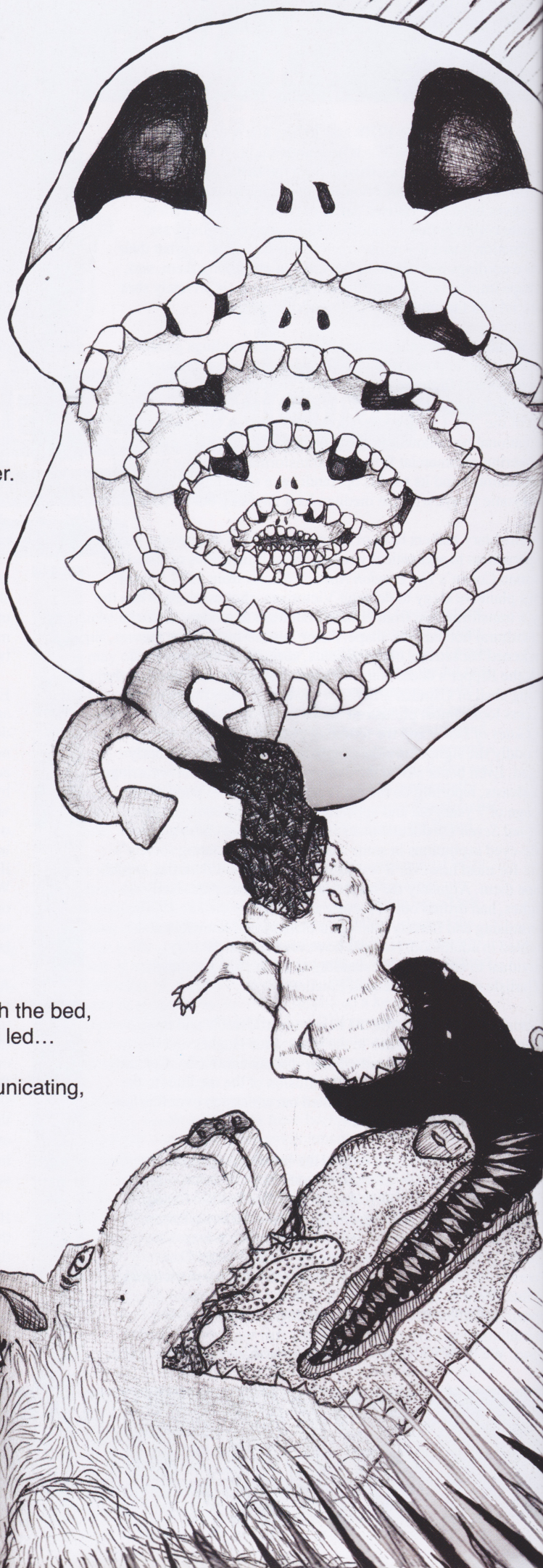
Then will they so simply slip you bait,  
to the improved mutes and slave stakes  
in a king's bet, left only waged.  
Your once infant neck half  
hugging the work-blade's one way embrace,  
or release rather.  
Your head let off, into that last capture,  
then replanted in a bed of upper class laughter.

Where'n it is never picked nor tended to...  
only left to a more decreptive death  
beneath the spur slash slay of all seasons.  
yet you...

Yet in you still, all day has resulted...  
you are singular.  
It's perhaps pride of all pulses.

Yet  
you get no god to got your back  
against the maggots sluice...  
You got no one ape  
you owe all that gross bone structure to.  
Yet whether molded or volved,  
your meaning of life  
long divided by day  
is to die solved.  
This means:  
this means terrible things to those who cherish the bed,  
who think in flame or safe for their beliefs, the led...  
that no river ever ends,  
that the sun and moon are simply misscommunicating,  
that the dark and light cross honests...  
"for to give you no pain".

Big sleep will certainly cure you of this gift,  
in its body ridden brutal business  
to what's motherlessness...  
or to be been bent born at all.  
A belly set flame  
top the genetic kindle of surname  
Born In burn and douse adjoining...  
handed over from egg,  
into evening day and disappointment  
locking arms across an end indefinite.  
Like opening a jar full of weather...  
this will only work once.

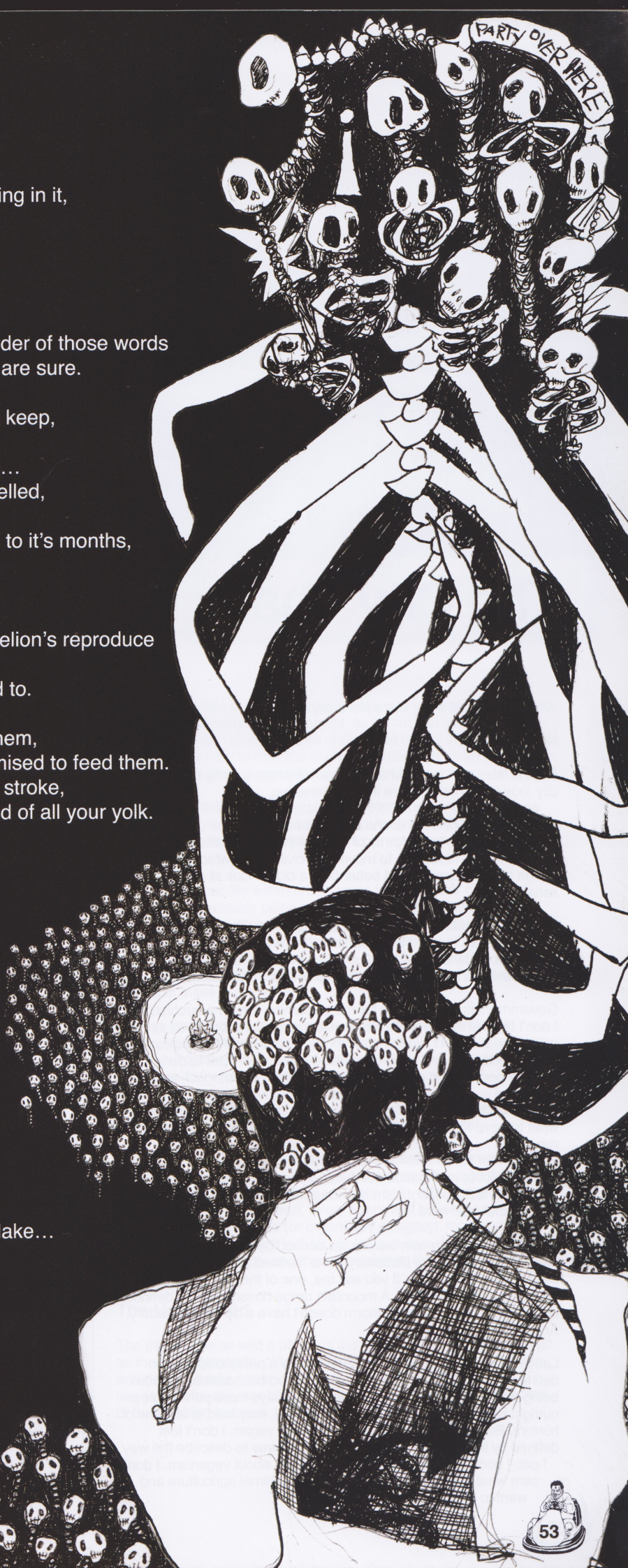





Like  
flattening the fold of a flag with wind still living in it,  
you brought a knife fight to a timeline.  
You see it is  
or can be said no simpler  
Than this,  
is the decoration of a death sentence...  
You might change the temperature and tender of those words  
till we plate glass close the globe, but they are sure.  
Their truth will not retreat...  
as long as mirrors locks and carbon copy's keep,  
these inventions supercede themselves.  
They are the sounds we made while falling...  
and Invent is then the pearl of all man's shelled,  
in the soot of things defense'd against...  
some thousand's year's day's feeding men to it's months,  
in what's, what was once the scroll of stars  
before all calendars were cut...

When single lives mattered more like dandelion's reproduce  
not the bloating gold fed think tank  
of named and shames it has been bansai'd to.  
With phantom mortgage pulsing on,  
where their heart would otherwise beach them,  
kidded perhaps, led where deeds had promised to feed them.  
Until the ticker takes that tiny breath called stroke,  
in the mayhem math and method it has held of all your yolk.  
And when it does, you will be lucked...  
like you are  
when thought is clear about yourself  
no recollection of the fears that stain  
your sleeping, your pinks  
free of any sinking feeling...  
all done and don't have to'd  
you will be lucked  
to have your heart attack you...

since  
you don't and never did  
see bursting skull nor tit  
where winter welds your windows shut...  
No, you see phantom lives a lived  
in 3AM apartment light reflecting loosely  
out against this mid-night on a man-made lake...  
Then you see miles of sleeping wheat  
stacked to single-serve ceilings  
amongst cement and meat,  
and then death abbreviated as eat.  
Then a hard boiled moon  
beside a grapefruit spoon  
and cross section of sun  
all on a small plate of sleep ...







# The City That's Not A City

by Margaret Killjoy

What do you call a city that's not a city?

No idea.

But the label isn't really what matters. What does a city that's not a city *look like*? That's where it gets interesting.

The settlement of cities is one of the primary traits that distinguishes a civilisation from other forms of societal structuring, like a band or a tribe. And if we're looking to move past civilisation (which is the core theme of my column), we'd better take a closer look at cities themselves.

My dictionary told me that a city is a large town. That didn't do me much good, so I turned to town: "an urban area that has a name, defined boundaries, and local government...." And immediately, a lot of the problems with cities are apparent.

Government is an easy one for me to dismiss: I'm an anarchist. I don't believe in "the State" or what is traditionally construed as government. I don't like the idea of one central body that makes all the decisions. And I don't like being told that all I get to do is pick the person who makes the decisions for me. I'm much more interested in community and individual self-governance. There's that old cliché: democracy is two sheep and three wolves deciding what to have for dinner. Well, at least that's a cliché in the circles I run in.

There's a lot of information out there, if you're curious, about anarchism and horizontalism and ideas like that, so I won't get too into that stuff here.

My second problem with the city, as defined by my computer's *New Oxford American Dictionary*, is its "defined boundaries." Defined boundaries are, if you ask me, one of the most emblematic pathologies of civilisation. A mountain range doesn't have a defined boundary, it has foothills. A storm doesn't have a defined boundary. And neither does my gender.

Labels can be useful as descriptors, but it's a pretty crap idea to define oneself or one's environs into "defined boundaries." Besides being essentially untrue (boundaries are always more permeable or outright illusory than we give them credit for), they lead to all sorts of horrors, like nationalism. For example: I'm a vegan. I don't feel defined by this, but it's the most convenient way to describe the way I eat. I don't have any nationalistic feelings about veganism. I don't care what you eat, not really. I just hate animal agriculture and want to have nothing to do with it.

So cities have governments and defined boundaries. Count me out.

Anti-civilisation theorist Derrick Jensen chose to define cities (and I paraphrase) as people living in such density as to require the routine importation of resources. His problem with this is that when a society requires the routine importation of resources, trade is well and good until there's a shortage and the other group doesn't want to trade. Then you've got war.

I'll throw this third element in as what we ought not let our urban areas continue to be.

But we can't abandon urbanisation. It would be utterly ecocidal. The human population of the earth being what it is, we need most people living in high densities so that we can minimise the footprint of each individual.

And honestly, I *like* living in the city. Well, I like living in lots of cities, but that's because I'm nomadic. I also love the wilds, but if I want the wilds to exist, I know that I need the cities to exist too.

Cities have long been a locus of the multiculturalism that makes our world so interesting. They're where ideas and peoples foment and intersect.


Now, to be honest, I don't really have a problem with continuing to just call urban areas "cities" and just change what we mean when we say that word. It could be argued that the same could be said of "civilisation," actually, and just change what it means to be "civilised," but my personal opinion is that the word civilisation is just too drenched in blood to salvage. And why do we need a word to represent "the society that is considered most advanced"? I'm not so interested in this whole "linear progress" thing. But I digress.

## The Non-City

So if we don't want government, defined borders, or the routine importation of resource (all features of most cities up to this point in time), let's just ditch those things and figure out something more interesting, useful, and liberatory.

The more I learn about tribes, as distinguished from bands or civilisations, the more the system appeals to me. I used to think that a tribe was sort of an enlarged family unit, a homogenous group that one was born into and only escaped perhaps through marriage or isolation. Turns out I was probably wrong.





As near as I can figure my anthropology, tribes are heterogenous with fluid boundaries. People and ideas move between tribes in ways that nation states would never allow.

The way I like see a city without its government or boundaries is a geography shared by a large number of overlapping tribes (or cultures, if you will).

And this is largely what cities have always been, right beneath the veneer of homogeny that the government encourages in the populace. Cities change drastically, block to block, building to building, even room to room! My experience of New York City (or Amsterdam, or anywhere I've lived) is a totally different experience than someone else who walks the same streets but hangs with a different crowd. Besides some shared resources, like the subway, we might as well be in different cities.

There are a number of alternatives to top-down government that have been proposed (and often tested to good results, though unfortunately the State has a tendency to re-impose itself by force). I personally like the idea of a federation of the tribes (or cliques, or cultures, or, hell, trade-unions if you're into that sort of thing) that comes together to make the decisions that affect the whole of the urbanised population.

Some folks have asked me what decentralisation on such a scale would mean for specialised trades that depend on such a complex web of industry, like space exploration. My suggestion is that everyone is going to have different priorities. The people who want to be involved in space travel can be involved in space travel. If enough gardeners and the like want to support the degree of deep specialisation involved in a field, they would be free to do so.

Personally, I think that anyone interested in space exploration has a long way to go to prove that such a program can ever be ecologically sustainable, but I don't put it past people to figure out a way how at some point. One fiction book, in fact, discusses this very thing: in *My Journey With Aristotle To The Anarchist Utopia* by Graham Purchase, we are introduced to our bio-regionalist, trade-federated space pioneers working on bio-plastic satellites. Wignutt? Of course. All most interesting ideas are.

## Sustainability

The profit motive of capitalism needs to be replaced with a sustainability motive. I challenge anyone who's now thinking

"hurr... capitalism and profit and selfishness are a biologically predetermined part of human nature" to go out and read some anthropology and biology before reading the rest of this magazine. Pay particular note to how the study of cooperation as an evolutionary impulse is given increased credence in biology today.

Now, sustainability *is* a biologically predetermined priority for us as humans. That is to say, the survival of ourselves and our species is dependent on reaching a balance with our environment. It really is do or die.

Finding sustainability within urban areas is a particular challenge, but one that is already being met by the agricultural pioneers of vertical farming, hydroponics, and permacultured systems. It's been argued that agriculture (well, monoculture, really) is what got us humans into this civilisation nonsense in the first place, but these more thought-out techniques might save us from much of the horrors of mass-scale farming.

Can we grow enough food in urban environments to avoid the routine importation of resources? Sure, why not? We have rooftops and we've got floor after floor of sunny rooms in skyscrapers. We have an unfathomable amount of vertical space as well.

The vegetables and fruits will be easy. The cereals and proteins will be more difficult, but certainly not beyond us to figure out.

Much of what it takes to be sustainable is actually made easier by human density: rather than setting up every small household with its own compost (for food and human waste both, although of course shit needs its own treatment), every apartment building can pool its resources. Well-designed (or organically designed, for that matter) urban areas don't require individuals to have cars. Most of the city is within walking distance, and there can always be public transportation.

## The Urban Wild

The city can be as wild a place as the forest. Buildings come and go as their use demands, outside of central planning. Organic growth and decay all take place, and biodiversity is actually quite high in large city. The city, or non-city or whatever, can easily be the home of the rewilded humans, the post-civilised.



Stitch This presents...

**SQUISH THIS**

MAKE YOUR OWN

# DAY OF THE DEAD

SALTY DOUGHY SHRINE...

**Tis the season to be spooky. Day of the Dead stuff is quite the flavour of the month. Why not celebrate the fleeting splendour of your dearly departed with our own Muertos Mini-Shrine? Cheap, easy and fun to make, all you need is probably already languishing in your cupboards... behind the skeletons.**

## THE NEEDINGS

2 cups of Plain Flour  
1 cup of Table Salt  
1 cup of Water

## YOU WILL ALSO NEED

Two Candles  
Acrylic Paints  
Clear Varnish

Beads, Glitter,  
Shiny Things... Stuff!

Glue

3 Paperclips & a Pencil  
An Oven, Tray & Tin-foil

Photos of those who  
are currently dead

## THE DOINGS

Combine the flour and the salt in a big bowl. Add the water gradually, just enough to make a nice doughy consistency.

Scoop the dough out onto your worktop and knead it for about 10 minutes to make it nice and glossy and pliable. I like to vent the day's torments onto my dough, it will happily take a bit of a pummeling.

If you can bear to wait then let your dough rest for about 20 minutes, wrap it in clingfilm so it doesn't go crusty...

**PHASE ONE COMPLETE!  
NOW FOR THE CREATIVE BIT...**





Divide your dough (big skull = half of the mix, medium skull = a quarter and the remainder divides up to make the three small skulls).

Work on one chunk at a time leaving the rest wrapped up. Start with a small one as they are easiest to handle, roll the dough into a smooth ball and place it onto a flat surface.

Use your thumbs to make two cheekbone imprints and then flatten off the front to make teeth. Using the wrong end of a knife (or other suitable poking device) make two nice cavernous eyes about halfway down the skull and a triangular hole for the nose.

Then use the sharp end of the knife to mark the teeth. Place your finished skulls onto a baking tray lined with tin foil.

The largest two skulls have a hole for a candle in their cranium. To create this push a candle into the dough (about an inch) to make a snug hole. You will need to re-do it a couple of times during the drying process as the dough will expand slightly as it dehydrates, scuppering any further insertions.

You don't need to worry about making them perfect, this is folk-art. A little bit of wonky is what the punters want these days and besides real skulls have cracks in them. You can always re-squish and re-make any that are too hideous before you dry them out.

Wires... take the paper clips and undo each one (watch your fingers on the sharp bits!) then wrap the straightened wire twice around a pencil to create a loop that will grip a photo. Put them to one side till you are ready to use them.

The largest skull will need hollowing out in order for it to dry properly (if they don't completely dry out your paint won't stay put and eventually they will go mouldy) so take a sharp teaspoon and carefully excavate from the bottom so the wall of the skull is about 2cm thick. Then push the wires into the 3 small skulls straight into the top.

Now pop them into a low oven (gas mark 1 or 2) for a few hours until they are all dried out. If your oven is too hot and they start to brown before they are ready then just put a layer of tin foil over them to prevent burning. Let them cool off and we are ready to decorate!

You can decorate your skulls in any way you like, the brighter and bolder the better. There are loads of examples of beautiful Mexican folk art online to get your brain-juice flowing. Floral swirls, moustaches, flaming hearts, wrestlers masks...

You can also add beads, glitter and little pieces of coloured foil to create your design. When it's all dried give them a coat of clear varnish to render them indestructible.

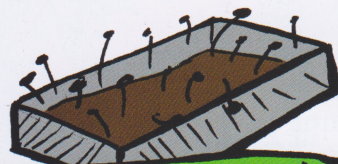
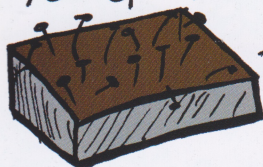
Any leftovers can be stored in the fridge for up to a week tightly wrapped in cling-film.





# THE URBAN GUERRILLA'S HOUSE TOY IS CLAMPED THE GARDENER IS NOT HAPPY

IDENTITY  
PROTECTED  
Too Good Looking



BECAUSE I'M  
I'LL GROW NICE  
FLOWERS FOR THE  
COMMUNITY  
PROJECT

5 WEEKS  
LATER

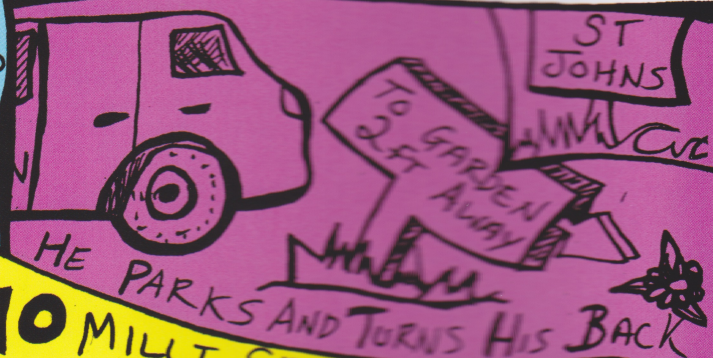


THE NURTURED AND LOVED  
BLOOMS ARE READY



COUGH!  
"COUGH"  
COUGH  
I BETTER  
TAKE  
THE CAR  
I CAN'T  
BREATHE

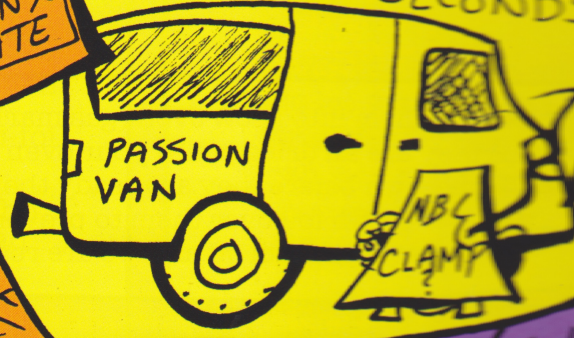
COMMUNITY  
GARDEN  
VOLUNTARY  
PROJECT



HE PARKS AND TURNS HIS BACK

10 MILLI SECONDS LATER

CHARGE  
ONE WEEK'S  
PENSION



HERE YOU ARE  
GEORGE

PUKKA  
THANX  
MATE

ST  
JOHNS

WHEEZE  
COUGH

YOU BASTARDS  
I'VE GOT EMPHYSEMA  
COUGH WHEEZE  
COUGH

HA HA  
HA HA  
HA HA  
You STUPID  
OLD GIT WE  
FOLLOWED YOU  
INTO THE CARPARK

1 HOUR LATER



SEX FOR A WEEK DAMN

DIRTY DEEDS DONE  
DIRT CHEAPER THAN  
USUAL

OH MY  
LOVER I  
WANT LET THIS  
ONE GO

UPRRRG

IS THERE ANYTHING  
THEY WON'T STOP TO?  
(TOTAL SCUM)  
(WITH A BADGE)  
(SPELLING MAY BE  
WRONG)

WHO ARE THESE CRUEL  
AND HEARTLESS  
CREATURES?

RELEASE ME IVE PAID

PAID

SHARKEY

431

DO NOT MIGHT

THE CLAMPS

IF HE  
AINT HERE  
SOON  
I'll  
DOUBLE IT

HELLO  
CAUGHT

TAKE IT  
WHEEZE  
COUGH

PARKING SHOP

WHEEZE  
SPLUTTER  
HACK HACK  
Cough  
CRAWL  
GASP

OH

**THE HILL**

IS A GENIUS

JUST A THOUGHT MAY  
I SAY A HUGE THANK YOU  
TO DO(MAKE UP) ITS  
ABOUT TIME MITCH  
PUT YOU ON THE  
STAGE. ANYONE WHO  
CAN MAKE ME LOOK  
FEMALE





COOKING IS FUN

# eat to the beat

by Wendi Jarrett

## Sausage & Tomato Casserole

### Ingredients

- 1 medium sized organic carrot ~ washed and grated
- ½ med parsnip ~ washed and grated
- ½ med onion ~ chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic ~ crushed
- 1 cup of apple juice
- 225 g (½ lb) low-fat good quality sausages
- Or Veggie bangers plus 1 tbsp of washed quinoa
- 2 tbs. Puy lentils ~ cooked for 10 mins and rinsed
- 1 tin of chopped tomatoes
- 150 g of chopped dates
- 2 tbsps. tomato puree
- ½ tsp. dried mixed herbs
- 2 tsp. smoked sweet Paprika
- 1 tsp. yeast extract (available from Daily Bread Co-operative )
- good grind of black pepper

### Method

- Using a hand grater or food processor, finely chop the carrot and parsnip together.
- Pour 2 tablespoons of apple juice / or a dessert spoon of oil into a microwave-proof dish/ jug, add the onions and garlic until just softened, cook on high for 3 minutes. Spoon the onion mix into the slow-cooker.
- You choose: In the non-stick frying pan or under a hot grill, brown the sausages (to seal and give them colour).
  - Add sausages and remaining ingredients to the slow-cooker and mix lightly.
- Cover and cook on Low for 4 - 6 hours or high for 2 hrs.
- Serve with Sweet potato and mustard mash or crunchy salad and wholemeal bread.

### TIPS for slow-cooking and ingredient use

To turn this into a one-pot dish ~ add washed potatoes - cut small into bite-sized pieces at the same time as the other ingredients. You will need to add about half a cup of water too. Quinoa is a great store-cupboard ingredient. It's a South American grain which uniquely has all 11 amino-acids, so it's a first-class protein! It's a great no-fat, easy way to add protein to a dish, especially stews, soups and casseroles.

**NB:** Remember to resist the temptation to lift the lid during the cooking process. Each time the lid is lifted you will need to add a further 30mins, as both heat and moisture are lost!

## Sunset Soup

*A lovely beautiful colourful soup, packed with textures and flavours to delight your palate. Just add some finely chopped 'scotch bonnet chilli pepper' if you want some 'heat' with a little fruity flavour on a cold autumn day. This soup is packed with good stuff to help keep colds and bugs at bay and boost your immune system and it tastes great too. Visit the market to get your veggies and you can swap the ingredients around to suit your taste if you like.*

### Ingredients

- 2 large organic carrots ~ washed and chopped
- 1 med parsnip ~ washed and chopped
- 2 med onions ~ chopped
- 4 cloves of garlic ~ crushed
- 2 bay leaves
- ¼ tsp. dried basil and ¼ tsp dried sage
- ½ each - red and yellow peppers ~ de-seeded and chopped small
- 750g (1½ lbs) pumpkin / butternut squash ~ washed, and chopped small
- 1 tin beans ~ cannellini, red kidney, haricot, black-eye (YOU decide)
  - ½ tsp. smoked sweet paprika
- 2 tbsps. quinoa - rinsed and drained
  - 1 tin of chopped tomatoes
  - ½ cup apple juice
- good grind of black pepper ~ to season
- fresh coriander ~ chopped fine to garnish



- Place all the ingredients, except the coriander and black pepper into the slow-cooker. Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hours.
- While it's cooking go for a walk with friends and gather some apples, plums or sloes to make puds or liqueurs!
- When soup is ready, you can either eat it as it is or, if you prefer, blend until smooth.
- Season and garnish with the black pepper and coriander and serve with fresh crusty bread.

*Buy a plug-in timer, then use it with your slow-cooker for freeing you up completely. Just set the timer to come on 5 hours before you want to eat and plug in the cooker. Don't forget to have the slow-cooker switched to low... or it won't come on and cook whilst you're out!*

*In autumn, it's really worth a visit to Smith's Farm Shop near Chapel Brampton and try a selection of their own pumpkins and squash, especially the wonderfully sweet and flavoursome 'Crown Prince'. You can also buy a vast selection of English apples and pears at one price p/lb. There are some really delicious varieties you don't get in the shops, the sort you see in the paintings by 'old masters'!*

## Using seasonal fruit to make a heart-healthy, tasty crumble

- 2 large or 4 med sized Bramley apples (you can substitute eaters, if not able to get cookers easily). Wash (in veg wash), cut and remove core and any damaged bits (worms included)!
  - ½ cup of chopped, dried dates or sultanas / raisins (previously soaked in apple juice)
- OR fresh or frozen blackberries, cherries, raspberries, rhubarb, plums, ... whatever you can forage!
  - 2 teaspoons of ground cinnamon

- 2 cups of oats
- 1 cup of plain flour
- ½ cup of margarine or butter
- ½ cup of unrefined granulated sugar (a light brown sugar makes it tastes toffee-like)!

- Lightly grease your ovenproof dish.
- On a medium heat, place a non-stick frying pan with the apple juice. Gently put the chopped apple pieces and dried fruit into the pan and simmer for 5 mins only.
  - Remove from the heat and spoon fruit into your ovenproof dish.
    - If you are using fresh or frozen fruit instead of dried fruit, spoon the fruit on top of the cooked apple.

- Place all dry ingredients into a mixing bowl, with your choice of tasty spice. Mix lightly.
- Add the margarine and, using either a fork or your hands, 'crumble' the margarine into the oatly/flour mixture, until there are no visible traces of the margarine.
  - Spoon the crumble on top the fruit. Place in the oven and bake on moderate heat until topping is light brown and crunchy.
  - Serve warm with a low-fat Greek yoghurt, custard or vanilla ice-cream.



# THE SPINNING DOCTORS

## ALPACA EGGS, SPOONBILLS AND DAVID BECKHAM

BY NERVY

**T**he Snipper started kissing me in the night, great soft, wet caressing kisses on the lips. But I couldn't wake up, I was in such a deep heavy sleep, like I'd died and been buried in cotton wool. I felt bad and said so, for all of two minutes, and then went back to sleep. I think he'd had an attack of insomnia because next thing it was 6am. and he was still cuddling me, I was too hot and all I could think of was David Beckham, Alpaca eggs, and Spoonbills.

It was on the news yesterday – Spoonbills are nesting in Norfolk. They are amazing birds that The Snipper had never heard of. Like a skinny heron, white with great long bills and a silly round spoon on the end. And we passed an Alpaca farm on the A428 near Deanshanger the other day, and I'm sure there was a sign saying "Eggs for sale". And David Beckham, well...

Psychotic illness is so horrible. Some people have one episode and get over it, but for others it wrecks their lives and they end up sliding down a slippery slope past heaps of Alpaca eggs with David Beckham sitting incubating them; but the spoonbills aren't beautiful and they say horrible things about you to David; you get very scared, and there's no cotton wool to hit at the bottom.

Amphetamines, cannabis, LSD and the legal stuff found in real and virtual surroundings, are for some people a phase of mind-broadening experimentation but for others are a key to a scary world of crazy threatening images, voices and intellectual decline. Dreams and drug-induced hallucinations seem to feed on what is already in your mind. If there's good stuff there, the experience can be good, but when your life is already full of crap, you're feeling down and troubled, or you have at least one pair of dirty genes, don't expect a trip to heaven.

Nervy likes the concept that our minds are somehow un-lockable by certain drugs, by psychotic illness and by dreaming, and we then get conscious access to the hidden parts of the processor, deep in the server that is normally located in an inaccessible little back room, dark with tiny coloured bleeping lights, whirring fans and sweaty heat, that only the maintenance man is normally allowed to enter.

Nervy's advice to those who think you may have become psychotic is to get medical help soon. Or if it's a friend or relative, don't ignore it - tell them why you are worried and go with them to the doctor. The maintenance guy is needed to accompany you into the locked room, armed with a prescription.

You won't want to get help, and you won't want to take the tablets. True, some can make you feel weird, but there are a lot of different ones to try and with the newer types, it should be possible to find a treatment that is acceptable. Good treatment isn't worse than the disease can be, believe me.

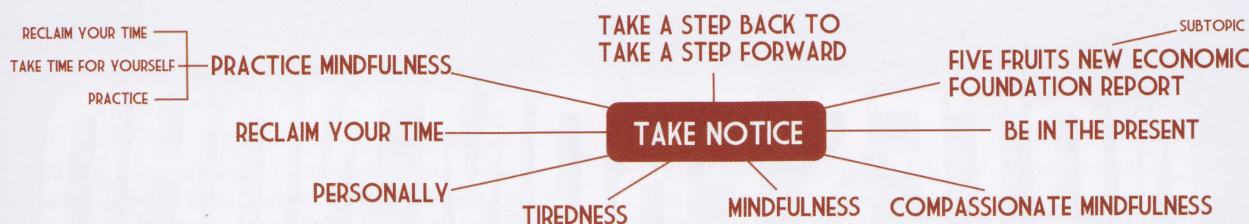
Some psychiatrists still seem reluctant to really listen, just diagnose and prescribe, but they are usually fine if you get to know them (they probably would have made excellent neurosurgeons or radiologists and could probably also be great lovers, though I wouldn't risk it personally). So get an advocate, a good articulate friend or relative, and use your GP to support you, too. If you haven't anybody, contact MIND or your local NHS organisation for an independent advocate. You may be feeling vulnerable and lonely so it may take an effort, but it will be worth it. Having someone to fight for you if necessary is a good idea.

Nervy would love to tell you that all the services for mental health problems are fine, but he can't (and goes on about it regularly: sorry). The treatment system is a bit patchy and the main issue is finding that professional you can talk to and you feel understands you.

And then please try not to be funny about taking some treatment. You're bound to want to try an infusion of coconut fronds in passion fruit juice, or even those alpaca eggs incubated under a spoonbill during a full moon - Nervy knows what you're like (and knows David too; he's far too busy; at least go with the spoonbill idea, it's slightly more feasible). But seriously, psychotic illness is, well, serious and it can be so hard for you and people who love you if you don't get it sorted.

Talking treatments do help, but few people manage to get through without the following: a supportive stress-free environment, no aggravating drugs or alcohol and some legitimate medication. Nervy has accompanied those searching for alpaca eggs and it was a long elliptical journey.





## 1 Take a step back to take a step forward

"Smell the flowers and take more baths". This was the guidance given to me on a leadership course by a senior member of the NHS clinical governance team. Take time to notice and reflect, or as our practice counsellor puts it: "Take a step back to take a step forward". Take a step back to see what's going on; move into your observing self / "be a fly on the wall". You can then appreciate what is around you and within you (noting especially beauty) being in the present moment.

## 2 New Economic Foundation Report - suggests "Taking Notice" as one of the five ways we can achieve a sense of well-being.

[HTTP://www.neweconomics.org/projects/five-ways-well-being](http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/five-ways-well-being)  
Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

## 3 Be in the present

Good mental health is best achieved when we are fully in the present. When we rest in awareness and are fully present, we are free from anxiety of the future and guilt/shame of the past. At these times we are able to have greater observation and awareness of our feelings and thoughts and recognise the truth that our sense of being who we are is defined by much more than just our thoughts and feelings, indeed we can see ourselves as separate from our thoughts and feelings. At times when we rest in awareness we are able to see our thoughts come and go. This concept of being in the moment is explained in Eckhart Tolle's book *"The Power of Now"* or by Spencer Johnson's *"The Present"*.

## 4 Mindfulness

Mindfulness has its origins within the Buddhist tradition, however mindfulness meditation has a growing evidence base especially for decreasing relapse in people with recurrent depression. There is a growing recognition that part of the depressive illness is a thinking illness; people who are affected by depression are caught in a cycle of thinking too much, focusing on negative thoughts and negative self belief. Jonathon Haidt in his book *The Happiness Hypothesis* likens our thinking mind to an elephant that wanders where it wants. Mindfulness helps to train the elephant and enables us to have skills to change how we think. Mindfulness training enables people to learn how to keep bringing their thoughts back to the present experience using a curious, non-judgemental mindset and just noticing what is happening, developing awareness. Noticing those thoughts that just bubble up into our mind without engaging judgemental emotion, observing them with curiosity. As we observe without judgement we are able to note and name what is going on in our thinking. Practising letting go enables us to develop skills to choose what we think about, rather than letting the elephant wander into the slough of despond.

## 5 Compassionate Mindfulness

I see so many people who continue past abuse, beating themselves up by ruminating on past experiences trapped in shame. When talking about the future their speech is often full of "I should". Learning how to be compassionate and kind with ourselves will enable us to be more able to be compassionate with others and create a compassionate society. Paul Gilbert has written eloquently providing lots of exercises to practice in his book *The Compassionate Mind*. One of my favourites is to think of someone (could be fictional or from literature) who is wise and compassionate. Get a clear picture of them in your mind. Now, what would they say to you about your present situation that is concerning you? All of these take practice, gradually training the elephant.

## 6 Tiredness

Many patients come and tell me how tired they are feeling, devoid of energy. They tell me they sleep well but feel permanently exhausted. A few turn out to have a medical cause for their symptoms, but most describe "dissatisfaction with their life". I work with people to try and focus them in the here and now, regaining some of the energy they are wasting in trying to predict the future or living in the past. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy has a focus that is very much in the moment and would see people predicting negative future events as a thinking error called "fortune-telling".

## 7 Personally

My own experience of mindfulness supports the evidence from research. I joined a group of colleagues and practised meditating for 30 minutes a day. The first experience was noting that I found it difficult to give myself permission to look after myself and spend 30 minutes meditating which seemed rather a luxury, to not be doing something. However, I have gradually been able to let go of the doing mode to spend more time just being. My second experience was that I had lots of rapid and rather negative thoughts racing around my head. Indeed it seemed that a lot of my inner dialogue was rather negative. This awareness has helped me to challenge some of these thoughts and to focus on more of a realistic self view. Having tried to practise other self-help techniques previously I must admit that this has been the most effective for me personally. Reclaim your time: we are travelling faster yet we don't know where we're going, we just want to get somewhere fast. Activity does not mean productivity. Guy Claxton describes in his book *Tortoise Brain and Hare Mind* how our intelligence increases when we think less. Essentially we have two ways of thinking: one happening in the here and now and one bubbling away on the backburner just below our consciousness. It is this second way of thinking that deals with complexity, and also provides a dialogue between our memory and our current consciousness. We need to train this way of thinking and use it appropriately for complex tasks rather than trying to use our problem-solving conscious mind, otherwise we will spin faster without getting anywhere, a bit like a truck stuck in mud.

## 8 Try Practising Mindfulness

8.1 Reclaim your time 8.2 Take time for yourself 8.3 Practise 8.4 Be compassionate



# NOTES FROM NOHO

## A GOD AT WORK IN NOHO

by Martin Marprelate

Raining in Noho. Sparkling trails of new water are running the streets like wet lightning underfoot. The shattered reflections of delinquent gods peer up as a dread-locked head bows against a downpour in the real world.

This ain't nowhere, Noho. Nothing ain't happening here. Gods breaking in the puddles, their ghosts in the glass – lost gods shadowing every lilting step of where this man goes in the glitter descending. This is what you can see when you reflect. It's all there in Noho. Welcome to Noho. Everyone's got one.

Tall Paul could see it as he bobbed along, hands pocketed, coat collar up, coal-black skin shining with smashed raindrops. He could see the gods and their sly smiles, their knowing glances but he didn't go eye to eye. The time may come for that, he thought, but not on this walk to work. They never entirely left him alone: humming the old songs from the islands like his granddad, grinning, smoking, blowing the horn. It made him frown but didn't stop the big smiles from breaking through when he met the good people in the street.

"I look the way I look. There's nothing I can do about it but people get the wrong impression. Don't get me wrong though, I can handle myself," he told his retired maths teacher in the corner shop.

"I'm sure you can," she said, twittering with nervous laughter, her face at least two feet beneath his and craning her head sideways to balance her hunched back. "This security guard thing isn't really me. It's not who I am."

He cast his eyes around the shop as he spoke: watching the girls by the sweets whispering conspiracies, the man by the bread checking the change in his pocket, the woman with the open coat.

The bread man, in jogging bottoms that didn't match his hoodie, was looking over at Tall Paul's generic blue uniform and white shirt. He drew his hand back from a loaf without meeting Tall Paul's gaze.

"People have a view of me because of this. It's not who I want to be."

"You should have tried harder at maths" his old maths teacher smiled and wagged a crooked, reproving finger.

Tall Paul unleashed the big smile that had convinced so many of the good people that this guy was ok: you know, this guy is all right.

"Yeah, you're not wrong there Mrs P. It wasn't your fault. You were a good teacher but maths is not who I am either."

There are gods in the eyeglasses of mathematicians: in the imperceptible grids and angles, collecting in the sections and diameters. They switch and stretch as we stare straight through them, breeding like bacteria on the throughput of numbers because a simple idea with so much physical potential is fertile ground for all kinds of divinity. It soaks through your shoes on the streets of Noho. If you don't know that you should have tried harder at maths.

And Tall Paul was right: a security guard wasn't who he was. He was something more like a shaman, warding off undesirable spirits with his dance. His dance involved inflating his chest and curving his spine upright when a drunk came into the shop. Drunk women, drunk men, drunk children – he had danced them all away.

Sidestep, sidestep, always in front of his partner, inhaling their potent breath, their pink, drowsy eyes wet with their commonplace hedonism, their sight kaleidoscoping the deceptions of their mischievous gods and then Tall Paul rises up like a gathering storm and they step back and they step back, bewildered, and they are outside the shop. It's like magic and, if you know your physics, anything that is like magic, is magic.

And sometimes it was something different.

The girls were little bone dolls (wrapped in skin, tracksuits and urgent whispers) with their fringes round their eyes like clawed visors. The darting speed of the first caught Tall Paul's attention and started him towards the door to intercept.

Mrs P said "oh dear" and stepped aside.

The girl's pockets were choking with Aeros, Mars Bars and Fudges and as Tall Paul caught her top they spilled across the floor. The other girl was trying to slip behind him so he stepped back, planting his hand against the wall to bar her escape. He already knew it would be one or the other. He couldn't stop both of them. The first was pulling away, stretching her tracksuit top, losing Smarties that tap-danced across the floor while she growled with the effort of struggling free. The second was trying to duck under his arm and beating on his back with fists that were barely bigger than a knot in a pyjama cord. What was in her pockets?

"Oh dear," said Mrs P stepping back a little further.



Tall Paul released his grip on the first girl just as she snarled: "Fuckin getoff" and threw all her weight against a restraint that was no longer there. She dived face first on to the pavement outside but then was up and gone, leaving a crushed Twix and two Toffee Crisp bars behind her. The other girl was now pinned against the wall behind Tall Paul's forearm.

"I int done nothing wrong, getoff," she protested as Tall Paul turned his full attention to securing his hold on her.

She tilted her head forwards, avoiding eye contact and Paul saw the roots of her fine brown hair sprouting from her translucently delicate scalp. She smelled sweet, shampoo clean: not the stale smoke aroma he was half expecting but her pockets rustled with packets of Skittles and Revels and her tracksuit bulged with bags of Cadbury's Éclairs.

"I have reason to believe you have items on your person that you have not paid for. Can you accompany me to the manager's office please," Paul said, letting his training speak for him while he concentrated on not breaking the girl's collar bone.

"Getoff, you're hurting me, I can't breathe," she screeched.

"No I'm not, empty your pockets," Tall Paul said, tugging the girl's tracksuit zip down. Three bags of toffee éclairs fell to the floor.

"Pervert," the girl mumbled into Paul's arm.

"He's showing a lot more patience than I would," Mrs P commented loud enough for the girl to hear.

Nessa, the duty manager, waddled across the shop floor intermittently bending over to gather up scattered sweets. The thread veins in her cheeks were enlivened by the motion.

"What have we got here then? What's your name young lady?"

"uck off," the girl sulked.

"Charming, either you tell us your name so we can phone your mother or we'll call the police and they can deal with you. The choice is yours," Nessa said, rolling her eyes at Tall Paul in exasperation. He sighed.

The shop door had closed and Tall Paul caught sight of his reflection there: perhaps twice the height of the girl. It wasn't who he was. Perhaps it's like this: gods blowing around like dust, billions of them, watching us, wanting us to bring them to life by inhabiting their little part of the universe, waiting for their chance. Perhaps it's like this: our gods are unfamiliar images of us bouncing back at ourselves. Perhaps it's like this: there is only one god and he has probably got a beard. Perhaps it's like this: there is nothing but meat and reactions and right and wrong is just what you choose it to be. Perhaps it comes down to this: some days the gods want you to have sweets, some days they don't. That's how it goes down in Noho.

Right and wrong worried Tall Paul. He suspected that in another universe there was a Tall Paul who was a superstar DJ record producer living the life that Tall Paul was supposed to be living. The right life. And if the gods that haunted Tall Paul told him anything, they told him that at any moment the right decision could give him the right life. They taunted him with it. Distracted him with it.

They bit him with it. No, the quickly building pain in his forearm told him something else: it was the girl biting him. He cried out and yanked his arm away but quickly brought his other arm across to catch hold of her as she struggled. She dug the chewed stubs of her nails into that arm and then into his wrist trying to prise her way free.

"No you don't..." Tall Paul grimly warned as he brought his strength to bear then added to Nessa: "I can't believe she bit me."

"That's not very nice is it. If you assault my staff then I'll definitely call the police. I don't care how young you are. And I'll have these back thank you," Nessa said, plucking a packet of M&Ms from the girl's trouser pocket. Something else came with it. The girl's phone.

"Look, blood on my shirt. Damn that hurts," Tall Paul exclaimed.

Mrs P frowned: "Best get a tetanus shot later on Paul."

Nessa was investigating the phone.

"Getoff my phone. That's private. You've got no right," the girl said but Nessa had found the number she was looking for and pressed 'dial'. She gave the girl a triumphant glare as she listened to it ring.

"Let me go," the girl pleaded with Tall Paul but he shook his head.

"No chance."

She tried to scrape her fingers into his skin but he was determined not to give her the satisfaction of registering pain. She went limp as she heard Nessa introducing herself on the phone.

"We've caught your daughter trying to steal a large amount of sweets and she has already assaulted our security guard. I suggest you come down here and collect her right away... what? Hello? Hello?"

Nessa was shocked.

"She told me to call the police and hung up on me."

"Bitch," the girl said without indicating who she meant.

"Well, we'll just have to do that won't we. Take her through to my office Paul," Nessa said.



To some young girl who had been present when a joke turned into a dare and then a plan, Tall Paul was a quick, strong, angry god. He had the measure of her in every way, had absorbed all the pain she could offer and now he was guarding her in an office while they waited for the police. She felt safer than she had all week.

"Have you got a girlfriend?" the girl asked, not really knowing whether she had a plan or curiosity at the back of her mind.

Tall Paul, leaning against the door with his arms folded, looked down at the girl who was seated in front of the store manager's desk. His smile lacked joy.

"Oh no, do not even go there, no way..." he shook his head, opened the door a crack and called out to Nessa.

"Any sign of them yet?"

There was no answer. Tall Paul leaned further out of the doorway and shouted: "Any sign of the cops yet Nessa?"

He heard her footsteps approaching but when she rounded the corner Nessa's face reacted to something behind Paul. He turned just in time to see the girl crouching to make a run at the opening in the door. He caught hold of her and lifted her off the ground as she kicked and punched wildly, striking a lucky blow to his shin that hurt.

"Jesus, where are they Nessa? I'm going to smack her one in a minute. What am I supposed to do?"

Nessa shrugged unhappily.

"They said they would send someone as soon as they could. Everyone's responding to incidents apparently."

"You've got to ring them again Nessa. We can't just keep hold of her here. They've got to come and do something with her."

"All right, give me a minute..."

Tall Paul put the girl back on her chair and returned to the door. He rolled up his sleeve and was surprised by what he found. Her short nails had left jagged grazes, and there was a livid red bite mark.

"Look what you've done," he said holding out his arm.

"I didn't do that," the girl said.

"Of course you did. I haven't noticed anyone else going at me like a wild animal today. What did you do it for? It didn't help you did it? Why didn't you just punch me or something? I've got to have an injection now. I hate injections."

"I haven't got AIDS you know..."

"It's not for AIDS it's for tetanus."

"Oh."

"Yeah... oh."

"Don't even know what that is..."

Tall Paul said: "Neither do I but it's an injection and that's bad enough."

"You should have just let me go shouldn't you?" the girl said with a sarcastic smile back.

"I'm not paid enough to deal with problems like you."

"Get another job then."

"Like what?"

"Mum was telling her boyfriend that Virgin are hiring technicians to install cable TV. You should go for it because he won't..."

The sound of Nessa's world weary shuffle in the small corridor outside interrupted the conversation. Tall Paul stood aside to let her in and Nessa began by speaking to the girl.

"Right, get lost you. I never want to see you in here again. Go. You've got away with it this time. Just get out of here..."

"Where's the police?" Tall Paul asked indignantly.

Nessa shook her head solemnly: "Not coming. They said they'll visit her at home when they've got officers free."

The girl stood up grinning.

"Look what she's done to my arm," Tall Paul protested.

"You should get a tetanus jab for that. I better walk her out of the shop. Come on missy, somebody up there must like you," Nessa said.

"You were a good security guard. Sorry for hurting you," the girl murmured as she slipped past, doing her best to suppress a giggle and flashing her divine little eyes at him.

"Yeah right," said Tall Paul and when he was alone he added: "It's not who I am."

It's not easy being a god in Noho where everyone is a little bit of what they say they are and no-one is who they seem to be. You have to be trickier than the average god and play by different rules. Tall Paul is not a security guard any more and right now, perhaps even as you are reading this, he is bringing happiness to the good people of the Noho by switching on their Cable TV...



A black and white photograph of three young men, likely hip-hop artists from Northampton, posing against a background of pink and purple graffiti-style arrows and city silhouettes. The man on the left is looking upwards, the one in the middle is looking directly at the camera, and the one on the right is looking slightly to the side.

# Northampton Hip-Hop: Ya get me?

by Gary Ingham

Wa gwarn? What the bejeezus is the difference between 2-step, Grime, and Hip-Hop anyway? This kind of thing actually happens in Northampton? What can it all possibly mean? Help a poor guy out, blud.

The signifiers are an easy grinding stereotype: A crisp walk and a sports casual-ty form of dress code. A blacked out BMW 4x4 with bass woofers that collapse council road surface budgets and any digestive system passing within 100 yards. A bomb explodes, a pit bull barks, a clap of gunshots, Tim Westwood, the son of the former Anglican Bishop of Peterborough, bawls something incoherent. There's a lot of surface in this game, these rags to riches stars rapping about players & their bitches. It's a long way from the break beat boom box of the late 70's east Brooklyn projects, and well, when it comes to this too real Northampton existence, what are they sayin' to me? Nahm sayin'? And what? A growing, nay, thriving scene, right here in soggy shoe town? Get out of...town. Even most people in the know don't know, and those who do get frustrated, because this shizzle (right?) is so under the radar it may as well be encased in the frame of a stealth submarine in the catacombs below All Saints Church.

In the quest for a hub to all this low-ridin' hubbub, we find Lal Muttock. Adam to his Granddad. A pipedream believer. A man with many strands of plans and fingers caressing the edges of many pies. First will come the radio show, then the TV show, the club, the record label, the wooworld Chico, and everything in it. Lal has contributed a spotlight on local hip hop artists in the weekly BBC

Northampton show 'The Weekender' for a few months now, so he is the ideal man to ask just what's going off, and on. What's the rhyme & the rhythm? Dear Lal, how & why? Can you give me a rough ramble on how the local scene got your attention to the point where you thought it should get some spotlight, and how that happened?

*I was speaking to Natasha House from BBC Northampton about givin' a voice to local urban artists and she asked me if I wanted to present an urban/hip hop section for the Weekender Introducing show (online and on 104.2FM and 103.6FM, 6-7pm Fridays kids!) I obviously accepted the challenge. Northampton's hip hop scene has always been producing great artists such as MC Colt and Ill Murk but only now are local venues hunting out the talent. I mean how mad is it that any one night these guys can MC at Bristol 02 to thousands of rapturous fans and then come home to shoe town the next day and don't even get a blurt...madness. The artists use Northampton as a springboard, they live here but never actually play, that needs to be rectified very soon. How did you first get into hip-hop? Why does it reach the parts other pigeon holes can't? My big bro got me into hip hop waaaay back in the 80's. He had all the best mix tapes sent over by mail, ACTUAL MAIL on ACTUAL CASSETTES from America. Mostly New York hip hop as it was easier to get hold of. To name but a VERY little few I used to listen to Kool Herc, Krs-1, Eric B and Rakim, Kool Moe Dee, Jonzun Crew and later on British artists like Hijack, London Posse, Silver Bullit and Gangstarr.*



This mish mash of everything involving rhythm & rhyme is a voice for hapless youth falling in the fail, swept down the easy flowing shitstream of nothingness modern living hands out. A reflection of a video game ringtone bleepin beepin world, urban claustrophobia and pirate radio static.

Our very own high risers right now in the town are Har-Q, whose last single 'Money' got the big video treatment and included the line *"I want to give my girl hypothermia from the ice on the wedding ring"* which I think is a lovely sentiment, and Ill Murk, a young veteran MC at 20 years old, who had his first booking at Fever nightclub in Northampton when he was 13. He has come along since then, less we forget his 'Welcome To Northampton' EP, with the opening 'Manna Rep Norf', with rhymes such as *'come check out my area... the nearest we've got to a farmer is the man that grows marijuana'*, to the recent 'Eff The Royalties' EP, with which he is now filling halls and spittin' lyrics on national radio.

*The scene is growing, what with Inspiration FM getting a full radio license, and that station is such an important tool for local artists of all styles. We have a massively diverse ethnic culture in Northampton, we have all the musicians that come with having such a rich mix, a radio station dedicated to urban and multicultural music based in Northampton is something we should be proud of and embrace. We also have Sidewinder Records on Wellingborough Road which is also a record label Sidewinder Raw Entertainment (SRE) whose roster has major influence on the UK Grime scene. I must mention Champagne Bubblee, who is also local and a real respected go-to guy on the scene. An amazing rapper, but also the host of Champagne Bubblee TV, an online TV show dedicated to UK hip hop and grime.*

One inspired happening from all this is the collaboration between artists from different fields, like the paring of local Indie rock bunch New Cassettes, and MC Colt. How did that idea come about, who was first, what next?

*I didn't just want to get artists in the studio for an interview. Talking's not what they're best at. I wanted to get local bands to work with music that was outside their perceived comfort zone. The first stab at this was with The New Cassettes song 'Won't Stop', which I asked MC Colt and his producer Merlin to remix with an edge. It came out brilliantly and I'm very proud to have orchestrated it.*

*I've seen Colt drop the track live and the crowd exploded...a very proud moment...The next collaboration is with Wizbit (Josh from The Retro Spankees), and it's going to feature the cream of Northampton's hip hop scene, it's gonna be a big tune and one that I'm going to push nationally and when you hear it you'll know why yo!*

What about if someone says an MC isn't as legitimate on stage as a guitarist?

*You can control a room with one word*

He wouldn't tell me which word though, the enigmatic scamp. Ok, come on, let's wrap this thing up, and I'm not going to even pun on the word wrap. What's the plans and hopes and where is this all going?

If David Cameron is resolute in his belief that this music is the cause of all pure evil then there must be something worthwhile in it, innit? If the Daily Mail have jerked their knobbly knees together in fear of society's corruption via two turntables and a microphone, I think I should get me some, y'get me? Nahm sayin'? Peace.

[www.myspace.com/illmurksre](http://www.myspace.com/illmurksre)

[www.myspace.com/harqrealm](http://www.myspace.com/harqrealm)

[www.myspace.com/admerlinproductions](http://www.myspace.com/admerlinproductions)

[www.champagnebubblee.tv](http://www.champagnebubblee.tv)





# BEYOND THE NORM

by Norman Adams

## **Northampton Council delighted to be in bed with dodgy contractor found colluding to push up prices.**

Most would think that a high profile investigation by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) into bid-rigging in the construction industry would have the council considering the ethics behind their decision making process:

## **Is it ethical for Northampton Council to be using Thomas Vale Construction?**

Northampton Defend Council Housing says it is not ethical and should be used as an opportunity to call on the government and local councils to stop outsourcing work to the private sector.

## **So what's the story in Northampton?**

Northampton Borough Council awarded a major Decent Homes contract to a company with a proven track record of bid-rigging and colluding to push up prices, and has since been investigated by the Office of Fair trading and fined £1,020,473. Norman Adams a tenant of the council has said "even the sanitised minutes go some way to showing our disgust."

The minutes of the 18 January meeting records the following:

*Mr Adams in referring to the Portfolio Holder for Housing's report and the reference in it to a named company and asked if he was aware of a press release of 16 October 2009 which stated that the company had a proven track record on delivering decent homes and that the Council was delighted to be working with them.*

*Mr Adams commented that he believed that the company had a proven track record of bid rigging and colluding to push up prices. At the time of the press release this company had been named by, and was under investigation by, the Office of Fair Trading since April 2008 having illegally pushed up the cost to the taxpayer for schools, hospitals, police stations and other major works in the public sector. The Office of Fair Trading had fined them over £1m in November 2009. The company had registered an appeal but this was only in respect of the size of the fine. Mr Adams asked if the Portfolio Holder was still content that the Council should be associated with this company.*

UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie states: "The widespread and systematic price fixing uncovered by the OFT is an inevitable consequence of the systematic privatisation and outsourcing of public sector construction work, especially in local authorities. "If the public sector is not able to build properties and buildings directly, then you are at the mercy of collusion among private contractors, to artificially increase prices. It is a grim irony that these policies have been pursued in the name of efficiency and cost savings." He added: "It is outrageous that ordinary workers have paid for the feather bedding of fat cat construction bosses, through their tax and council tax payments.

Northampton tenants have asked, "What effect if any will intervening at a council meeting have, apart from Adams feeling better for having had a rant?" The public may be outraged, but simultaneously disconnected: proof, perhaps, that advanced societies are so filled up with noise and distraction that even glaring moral outrages have no real traction.

## **Eastfield and Thorplands (Northampton East) Regeneration Scheme**

Following the Council's submission of its Revised Expression of Interest in January 2010 to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the Council is currently earmarked to potentially receive £100 million in PFI credits from the Government to enable the delivery of improvements and regeneration on the Eastfield and Thorplands estates through a Public Private Partnership over the next 30 years. Resident Steering Groups of volunteer tenants, leaseholders and homeowners are now working closely with the Council to develop the schemes Outline Business Case which is planned to be submitted to the HCA should it get Cabinet approval on the 3rd November 2010.

Northampton - Defend Council Housing (NDCH) tenant led campaign group was formed in 2004, to fully support the aims and objectives of the national Defend Council Housing (DCH) campaign demanding the 'Fourth Option'. The prerogative is to encourage direct investment in decent, secure, and affordable council housing as an alternative to the government's three privatisation options, by stock transfer, PFI or ALMO, to enable local authorities to respect the choice of their tenants and bring all homes up to at least the government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010. The defend Council Housing campaign is also encouraging local authorities to build a new generation of decent, affordable and secure council homes for rent, accountable to an elected local authority landlord, and to give a clear commitment to defend the lifelong secure tenancy that council tenants enjoy. DCH declares that local authorities should uphold the right of everyone who needs or wants to rent public housing to do so without time limit or means testing so that council housing can again become tenure of choice and council estates can once again be a place that people are proud to live in.



NDCH is clear about their views on PFI and going by recent letters to the press most tenants' and come to that leaseholders and homeowners on the affected estates have not warmed to this regeneration.

The council has set up so-called Steering Groups - to find out what the state of play is. It would seem simple. I put in a freedom of information request for the minutes of the meetings, but was surprised to be informed by the council that no notes were taken at the meetings so there are no minutes to supply. This the council maintain has all been agreed by the Steering Group. The Steering Group members I have spoken to tell me this is not the case, and will be demanding that ALL meetings have minutes taken.

## ASBESTOS -take the shit out of our homes

Northampton - Defend Council Housing  
started a campaign years ago around the issue of asbestos in our homes, to expose the risk to people unknowingly exposing themselves to asbestos by doing DIY in social housing through ignorance and lack of information.

As early as 2006 we found the council and its committees trying to slow down our progress by pulling the plug on committees, and hiding the findings of government watchdogs. As a local paper reported *"A watchdog report into the internal operations of Northampton Borough Council revealed a breach in health and safety rules while work was being carried out in some council properties in 2006. The document was written in December last year but made public by the council this week following pressure from housing campaigners"*.

The campaign is still ongoing. As the management plane will have the devil in the detail, we in Defend Council Housing will be looking at the detail and making our observations known.

At a recent cabinet meeting the council did put forward a management plan that was in my opinion crap, and after telling them that at the cabinet meeting the council agreed to do a rewrite.

## Sir Cyril Smith.

Former Liberal Party MP Cyril Smith has died (3 September 2010) at the age of 82.

Smith was always described as "larger than Life" and "renowned for his blunt speaking"; I might have a few more choice words about his character. No wonder he belonged to the Liberal Party, the spiritual home of phonies and hypocrites and no wonder he was given an OBE and a Knighthood.

Cyril Smith was in the pocket of an asbestos industry which killed (and is killing) thousands and thousands of people.

As a friend once wrote to me "I can't shed any tears for this hypocrite. "Man of the people", don't make me laugh. Instead of fighting for justice for the victims of asbestos, he was an apologist for Turner & Newall and even asked them to write his speeches!"

## Who are Turner & Newall?

The Lancashire manufacturing giant Turner & Newall (T&N), once the world's largest asbestos conglomerate, exposed millions to a lethal carcinogen in full knowledge of its dangers, using PR firms and politicians to hide a truth that it had secretly admitted to in 1961, namely that "the only really safe number of asbestos fibres in the works environment is nil".

It is claimed that T&N also relied on the assistance of Cyril Smith. During the summer recess of 1981, Smith allegedly wrote to Sydney Marks, the head of personnel, informing him that the House would debate EEC regulations on asbestos in the next parliamentary session.

"Could you please, within the next eight weeks, let me have the speech you would like to make (were you able to!), in that debate?" It is claimed that T&N's draft is almost identical to the speech delivered by the Rochdale MP, stressing the need for less regulation and arguing that substitutes for asbestos should be approached "with caution". "The public at large are not at risk," it is claimed said Smith. "It is necessary to say that time and time again."

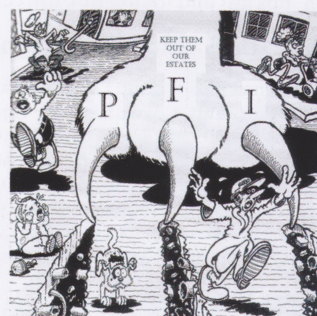
By 1999, the game was up for T&N when the European Union banned the import and production of asbestos throughout the European Union.

The End.

Facts not fiction from Northampton Defend Council Housing



**KEEP FAT CATS OUT!  
NO TO PFI**



NORTHAMPTON: Defend Council Housing as always maintained that PFI was a lot good value for money, and that cost tended to rise, and that time lines were not met, of course the administration said we were uninformed and wrong.

The National Audit Office report into the Performance of PFI housing projects recently published in June 2010 found:

Most projects have suffered significant cost increases and delays and "Overall 21 of the 25 projects signed up to date, have experienced cost increases, 12 of which were over 100 per cent" and on the subject of timelines "delays range between five months, and five years and one month, the average being two years and six months"



# BABY, IT'S COLDITZ OUTSIDE

*Concluding his tour of Northampton's Eastern Bloc, Alan Moore looks at the plans to bring Glasnost to the gulag and wonders at the advisability of the escape committee entering a consultation process with the Commissar.*

Okay. I'm studying my Eastern District articles and thinking much the same thing as our urban planners must be thinking when they bother to survey the actual place that I'm referring to: how in God's name is anybody meant to tie this fucking mess together into a coherent whole? I'm looking at a document entitled 'Northampton East Regeneration Principles' (June, 2009) which outlines the ongoing PFI initiative meant to improve the Thorplands, Eastfield, Blackthorn and the Bellinge areas, with its perfectly reasonable-sounding outline of the lengthy consultation process that involved the various districts' residents, and yet for some reason my mind keeps drifting back to the arresting image of Bellinge's daisy-decorated crime-prevention fencing as discussed last issue.

The first mention of this Stalinist street-furniture to make the local press appeared during the June of 1997 under the headline END OF THE CRIMINAL 'RAT RUNS'. A sidebar promised consultation with the residents to see what routes would need to be left open in order to access schools, shops, work and transport. Right here, it is possible to see the problems in this process, so let's take a closer look at the realities behind the situation. The Eastern Development was hastily erected in the middle 1970s and from the start seems to have been intended to contain a population just as big as the existing town but with significantly lower average incomes and only a fraction of the town's amenities to entertain its burgeoning and underfunded neighbourhoods. While it doesn't take a statistician to work out that these conditions will inevitably lead to increased crime, the response by the authorities that are responsible for those conditions never bothers to address the underlying issues such as unemployment or social dissatisfaction, but instead is almost always aimed at making the policing and control of dispossessed communities more manageable for the powers that be.

Thus, in the 1997 article mentioned above, while a Police Inspector states that we are talking of 'around 15 to 20 people who (...) corrupt the area', we have measures being talked about that will affect the whole of the estate along with all its hundreds of inhabitants. Moreover, since the general readership will probably assume that there's an atmosphere of criminality which hangs above the whole place like a reeking Fagin overcoat, the language of the headline turns the paths and streets that ordinary people use each day to 'RAT RUNS' and thus reinforces the idea that socially deprived communities are actually a form of vermin. This, as Adolf Hitler would attest, is a time-honoured method of preparing for the rounding up or ultimate removal of a class of people by describing them as rodents, bugs or something else deserving of extermination, like in those car safety ads they used to run on television that depicted hoodie-sporting urban car thieves as white-eyed rabid hyenas.

Also, we can see that the headline is already speaking of the 'END' of these 'RAT RUNS' as a foregone conclusion, even though the sidebar promises a 'consultation process'. In the usual way of things, this process seems to involve posting leaflets (which, of course, most people will not read) or posting notices (in places where most people will not see them) and, importantly, is not a consultation to decide *whether* the scheme will go ahead, but only on the finer points of its implementation once it does. The residents are only to be asked which paths should be left open for their kids to get to school, or parents to get to the shops or work. Even here, subsequent headlines in the local press suggest that many residents, while they may well have been 'consulted', had seemingly not been listened to. A headline from 2000, FENCED-OFF ESTATE 'FEELS LIKE COLDITZ', has an article attached in which aggrieved Bellinge inhabitants complain of children forced to walk to school along busy main roads and voice concerns that in the event of a not-unheard-of fire, the fire services would be delayed by the existence of the fencing. They also point out that the demolition of a problem block of flats (presumably containing the '15-20 people' who 'corrupt the area') had greatly reduced crime and made the fences doubly unnecessary.

Unsurprisingly, since it appears the whole scheme was for the greater convenience of the authorities rather than residents, these outcries were ignored. Instead, it was suggested that the fences should be brightened up with gold knobs painted on the top and decorative elements designed by local children. This is where the metal daisies come in, obviously. Other plans for the rebranding of the area included a suggestion, made in 1998, that problematic Billingmead Square should be renamed Albert Square in honour of TV's famously murder-and-crime-free East End neighbourhood.

All of which brings us back to these current proposals for 'regenerating' Bellinge and its sister penal colonies. Once more we see a 'consultation process' which seems geared more to the needs of those suggesting changes...in this case the Private Finance Initiative company backing the scheme...than of the residents themselves. There's a proposal, for example, that green spaces which are underused (presumably including those on Bellinge that are completely enclosed by fencing and thus inaccessible) can be clawed back for potentially lucrative 'development'. What is happening is that the council has received some tens of millions earmarked for regeneration and for reasons of its own has chosen to bypass the town's (and pretty near the country's) most neglected area, Spring Boroughs, so that it instead can make some dubious improvements to another district, working with a business partner in conditions that, presumably, it finds more favourable. I refer you to the rumour picked up from my dad with which I started out this trilogy of articles.

The more things change...and so on.



### Alex Musson

Web designer by day, comedy mag writer by night. Mustard is photocopied in front of a live studio audience.

[www.mustardmag.org/alex](http://www.mustardmag.org/alex)

### Andrew Waugh

Illustrator on Mustard Pages likes to write things and draw funny pictures, some of which can be seen at

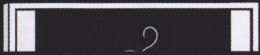
[thismeanswaugh.blogspot.com](http://thismeanswaugh.blogspot.com)



### Barney Farmer/Lee Healey.

Writer [barneyfarmer@hotmail.com](mailto:barneyfarmer@hotmail.com) and cartoonist Lee Healey [leehealey@btinternet.com](mailto:leehealey@btinternet.com) have worked together forever, in that time contributing to publications including Viz, Maxim and the one in your hands.

## Dr Trebo



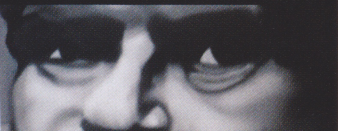
### Claire Ashby

I do gardening, art work, chewing gum and kick ass. Hate politicians and red tape. I like being outside.

## THE URBAN HOUSE

### Calluz

Loves chrome, fat caps and drippy pens.



### Dave Hamilton

Co-author of the Self sufficientish Bible and [selfsufficientish.com](http://selfsufficientish.com). He also works as a freelance writer and runs wild food/foraging courses.

Contact: [dave@selfsufficientish.com](mailto:dave@selfsufficientish.com)

## O CHAMBER

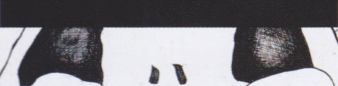
### David Quantick

First worked with savage pencil at the NME. Since then he has written television comedy [Brass Eye, TV Burps] radio shows [One, The Beggars Guide] and, most importantly, is the voice of Channel Four's Coach Trip.



### Doseone

Adam kidd drummer - poet...rapper...producer...cat owner



### Dick Foreman

Dick Foreman lives in a house made entirely out of cardboard boxes containing old underground comics. He says you can't beat a good 'Zap' for its first rate insulating properties.



### Eric Rivera

A compulsive (yet unconvincing) liar, Eric Rivera grew up in the Midwest: a small, stable country in the center of the United States. He thinks we'll all be living in underground bunkers within ten years, most of us destined either for the mandatory euthanasia clinics or televised executions. In the meantime, he draws and paints.

[www.colognefactory.blogspot.com](http://www.colognefactory.blogspot.com)



### Gary Ingham

Writer of Blank Stares and Cricket claps fanzine, and chief hassle stirrer of Broken Shackle Tabernacle live music promotions of Northampton. Gary was awarded a certificate for completing the 25 meters front crawl in 1986.

[www.myspace.com/brokenshackle](http://www.myspace.com/brokenshackle)



### Gary Mills

artist, writer, runner & ghost  
<http://radonbrainstorm.blogspot.com>



### Hoax

The creative team behind Dodgem Logic and responsible for this issues cover and feature article.

[www.thisishoax.com](http://www.thisishoax.com)



### Iain Sinclair

is a tolerably contented prisoner of London. When possible, he escapes to a boat-building in St Leonards-on-Sea. He would like to make it clear that he was in Hackney, when the old pier burnt down. 'Ghost Milk', a book of Olympic madness and voluntary exile, will be published in 2011 by Hamish Hamilton. A slim and whipper seaside booklet, 'Postcards from the 7th Floor', is still wet from the press (Pighog, Brighton).



### Joe Brown

Designer, Photographer, Musician, and now apparently Writer. Is there nothing he won't take a vague flailing stab at?

[joestupidstupid@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:joestupidstupid@hotmail.co.uk)



### Kevin O'Neill

Stone Age comic book artist, who refuses to be dragged beyond the 19th century. Kevin has ink in his veins and dyslexia explains him having the worlds largest collection of corn.



### Martin Marprelate

Martin Marprelate. Little Martin Marprelate. Was born around 1508. And everywhere that Martin went. He was a pushy malcontent.



### Margaret Killjoy

Margaret Killjoy is an itinerant and adventurer who contributes regularly to SteamPunk Magazine and Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness. They have a blog:

[www.birdsbeforethetrom.net](http://www.birdsbeforethetrom.net)



### Melinda Gebbie

Former underground cartoonist, professional pomographer, author, sculptress, lecturer and illustrator of Lost Girls [Written by Alan Moore]. Melinda now resides in Northampton for her sins.



### Norman Adams

He's grey, he's gay, you're in his fucking way! Norman Adams! Norman Adams!



### Patrick Smyth

Philosophises in tweed while tending to a bonsai. Occasionally blogs from his mac because non conforming is no fun if you're the only one doing it.



### Robin Ince

My fingers are made of 1000 penguin paperback papercuts.



### Savage Pencil

[www.savagepencil.com](http://www.savagepencil.com)

Email [savx@savlab.demon.co.uk](mailto:savx@savlab.demon.co.uk)



### Simon Cooper

Illustrator, GSOH, 21ish, honest, reliable, sort, hairy, likes drawing and colouring in.

[www.cooperillo.com](http://www.cooperillo.com)



### Stewart Lee

Stewart Lee. Born in 1968, the Summer of Mounting Indifference after the Summer of Love, Stewart Lee was once this country's 41st best stand up comedian.



### Steve Aylett

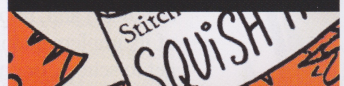
Steve Aylett has written books such as LINT, Slaughtermatic and The Inflatable Volunteer, as well as comics like The Caterer and Get That Thing Away From Me.

[www.steveaylett.com](http://www.steveaylett.com)



### Tamsyn Payne

50% CRAFTS, 40% CAKE, 10% MISCELLANEOUS... all woman...ish.



### Wendi Jarrett

Wendi's food for health activities supports a range of local communities and their 'getting to grips with food'. She encourages sharing, teaching and learning.

Contact her on 07749873187 or email [wendi4news@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:wendi4news@hotmail.co.uk)



### Local services

Welfare Rights Northampton

01604 636112

Citizens advice Northampton

0870 120 2433

CAN Northampton

01604 622121

Housing and debt advice Northampton

01604 623700

Homelessness

[www.kirkbytrust.org.uk](http://www.kirkbytrust.org.uk)

Northampton Volunteers Centre

01604 637522

The Lowdown Northampton

01604 634385



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